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THE SACRIFICE OF SITA

OR

THE ESSENCE OF THE RAMAYANA

BY

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1943

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PREFACE

It is more than eight years ago that the last volume of my work on the Mahabharata was published. I have studied the Ramayana since, and find that, like the Mahabharata, it too is an account of systems of Hindu Philosophy and Religion—only in a different form. It deals with the Dvaita or the dualistic school of Vishnu, while the Mahabharata is a story of the Visishtadvaita or the qualified monistic school; and it is for this reason that Rama is said to be half, and Krishna a whole, incarnation of God.

I have not published my explanation of the Ramayana, as I have not yet hit upon the best form of presenting it. One of the criticisms against the earlier work, not without force, was that it was difficult to follow. I have therefore been casting about to see if I could present the Ramayana in a form more easy to understand. The little experiment I made two years ago in *Mira and Mahavir* has led me to believe that the dialogue-form may not prove unsuitable for the purpose; and this little work is a further attempt in the same direction—to explain in as simple and clear a language as I can the essential idea of the Epic. It is intended to serve only as an introduction to a fuller and more detailed explanation of the whole, for which, however, I must ask the reader's patience for a while. As the Upanishads are the foundation of all Hindu thought, I intend to publish a study of some of them before long, to be followed by an explanation of the Ramayana as an account of the problem of the dualistic school of Vishnu and the corresponding systems of Hindu Philosophy.

This little work assumes that the reader is familiar with the main events of the story of the Ramayana and, to a certain extent, of the Mahabharata too; but this, in a country like India is, I believe, not too much to expect. I think it unnecessary to recount them here, as I propose to examine them in detail in terms of the different systems of Philosophy and Religion before long.

Hindu College, Delhi.

N. V. T.

August, 1943.

THE SACRIFICE OF SITA

SCENE I.

Time : Morning, 8 a. m.

A PINE FOREST IN THE HIMALAYAS

Two years have passed since we saw Mahavir, and he has grown both in body and mind. He is still sparely built, and there is the same serious look in his eye. But a new softness gleams in his face, and a smile sometimes plays on his lips. He has settled down as a college lecturer, and set up a new home with a pretty wife. Uma is tall and full of life, with bright, beaming eyes, and is four years younger than he. His sister Mira is married too, and is happy in her new home. Mahavir has his vacation now, and is out on a walking tour in the Himalayas. Uma accompanies him. They have walked for some time and, leaving the broad pathway, have strayed into a pine forest. A cottage looms in the distance.

MAHAVIR—This is wonderful. There is a breath of new life in the fresh air that comes through the pines. We have walked since daybreak and wandered far into the forest ; and yet I do not feel tired.

UMA—Nor do I. The morning was so beautiful. Did you notice the sunrise as we climbed up the hill ?

MAHAVIR—Only a Kalidas could describe it. It was a dome of rainbow-tinted clouds ; and the colours, now mingling, now melting, now apart—with the sky, air and hills rolling

into ever changing shapes in a wonder-vision of a thousand hues. This too is wonderful. Look (*pointing to the hills before him*).

UMA—Those pretty flowers—how small, yet how sweet. It seems as if the white light of love in the bosom of the earth had burst into rainbow hues, and each was a flame in the heart of a flower,—yellow and purple and blue. (*Stepping aside*) I almost fear to walk, lest I should tread on these tiny, tender things.

MAHAVIR—Flowers are stars born of the joy of the earth.
(*Wistfully*)

Tread softly, for our hearts are lying here.

UMA—You could put it into rhyme for me.

MAHAVIR—(*Taking her hand*) And call it the wedding of Uma on earth and Usha* in heaven! Now you blush: and your eyes smile even like the flowers and the sunbeams peering through the saffron robes of the dawn.

UMA—You should be a poet by profession,—that is, a flatterer in form.

MAHAVIR—I do not know about flattery. I am afraid I could not flatter,—even you. But I have my dreams. I had one last night. Did I tell you of the dream I had two years ago, which changed the whole course of my life?

UMA—Of Krishna, and how you came to believe in God?

MAHAVIR—Yes: but I have never seen the like of it again. I have tried to recall it, but in vain. The form, the figure,

*Usha means Dawn in Sanskrit.

the speech have vanished,—only the memory remains. I am a changed man now, and believe in God. But not like Mira. To her He is a person, a living being, even as he is to you, though not to the same extent. I cannot have your faith. I have read some of our sacred books; but the more I read, the less I understand.

UMA—We need faith to sustain us. There is a limit to knowledge : it can only differentiate. But I too have my doubts. I tried to read the Mahabharata, went through a few chapters, and gave it up. Some of the things it contains are so shocking. But I have not lost my faith.

MAHAVIR—Mira thinks it is an account of Philosophy in story-form. How she got it, I do not know. I have read the Ramayana. It is not so shocking; but I am inclined to think more highly of Ravana than Rama. He is a great gentleman; and how Rama is a deity and Ravana a monster, I simply cannot understand.

UMA—Indeed !

MAHAVIR—Yes, and I could show it to you. But we have been walking and talking, and you must be tired. We have wandered far, and I do not know if there is any habitation about. Look : that is a neat little cottage. Let us see if we can get something to eat and drink. We have to move on again.

They walk up to the cottage and, as they approach, they hear some music. They pause and listen :

O Lord of Raghus, Raja Rama !

Saviour of sinners, Sita Rama !

After a little while the music stops, and a little girl comes out to meet them.

LITTLE GIRL—Step in, this way. Our Father knows and bids you welcome.

BOTH—This is strange !

LITTLE GIRL—Our Father knows. He is a great devotee of Rama, and we call him Valmiki. He said to us this morning, "There are two strangers coming to the Ashram today. They seek, but do not find. One of them thinks and suffers ; the other has faith, but knows not. Make them welcome." I believe you are the two he spoke of. Step in this way. You are very welcome.

Mahavir and Uma look at each other, and then follow the Little Girl in silence.

SCENE II.

A simple, unfurnished room inside a thatched cottage. The sage Valmiki is seated cross-legged on a deer skin, with eyes closed as in meditation; and three boys and three girls, of varying ages from six to eleven years, are seated on his right and left. They are singing—

O Lord of Raghus, Raja Rama !
Saviour of sinners, Sita Rama !

Valmiki opens his eyes and joins in the chorus in a deep ringing tone. Then they stop.

VALMIKI—The hour approaches when the voice that is still will speak again. Children, your lessons are done, and you may retire. Only the youngest, Usha, might stay. The strangers have arrived. Bid them welcome and bring them in.

The children disperse quietly. Usha goes out, and after a little while leads in Mahavir and Uma, and awaits further orders. The sage makes a sign and she retires with a quiet smile.

VALMIKI—Sit down, before me. (*They sit down on his right and left*). You are very welcome. I was expecting you.

MAHAVIR—This is strange. We did not know that there was an Ashram here, and came this way by the merest chance.

VALMIKI—Yes ; but there is nothing strange in this. You seek, but do not find. You have read the Ramayana, and think more highly of Ravana than Rama !

MAHAVIR—Yes, O holy one. I seek, but do not find ; and the more I read the less I understand. Here is Uma, who is shocked by the Mahabharata. I have read some of the hymns of the Vedas, and cannot understand why they should be regarded as divine. The Upanishads appear to be as difficult. Hinduism itself is so extraordinary. It is the one religion in the world that does not insist on belief in God for the salvation of the soul. It has millions in its fold who do not believe in him, and excludes many more who do. If you can explain all this, there is nothing in the world I would not give to learn. I have discussed these questions with Pandits and men of learning, but no one seems to know so simple a thing as what a Hindu is. Indeed, some of them believe that Hinduism is a society, culture, civilization,—anything but a religion ; and that leaves me yet more confused and distressed. Can you, O holy father, help me to understand ?

VALMIKI—These have been mysteries for years, and there is not a great religion in the world but has them. But now

the time has come for man to know. Knowledge has its dangers, even as life; but ignorance is worse than death; and man must know to live. This mighty war that seems to envelope the earth is but a symbol of the conflict of forces that sway the world; and new forms of life are waiting to emerge out of the ruin of the old. There is an innate connection between the obvious and the occult, and I know what you seek and desire. And I will tell you what I know. But there are others too besides me. We have our Ashrams here and call ourselves by the ancient names. There is Visvamitra can explain the Vedas; Angirasa knows the Upanishads; Vyasa can expound the mystery of the Mahabharata; while I can tell you something of the secret of the Ramayana.

MAHAVIR—It is the Ramayana that puzzles me at present. I had thought that Rama at least would come up to my standard. I have read it and re-read it; but it has baffled me. Rama is half an incarnation of Vishnu: What is an incarnation, and why only a half? How can a woman be born out of a furrow, as Sita, his wife, is said to have been? Rama is held up as a paragon of virtue and filial obedience, for he went into exile at the bidding of his step mother, Kaikeyi. But his father never asked him to go—and he left him to die! Nay, he told him that Kaikeyi had practised deceit in the matter, and yet Rama would not desist, and his father died of grief. Rama is said to have been born to destroy the Rakshasas; and yet the same Rakshasas are the descendants of the gods,—and their chief Ravana is fourth or fifth in direct line from Brahma himself,—the supreme creator of the universe. It seems it is enough to call a man ten-headed to treat him like a monster. But

this Ravana is a strange character : he is well versed in the Vedas ; he has Brahmanas in his court who recite its hymns, offer sacrifices, and pray for his success. He never ill-treated a woman but once in his life, when he was young, and vowed never to repeat the offence. As for Sita, he carried her away indeed, but not without cause, and then treated her with all due honour and begged her to be his foremost queen. And what about Rama ? There is no instance in the Epic of a Rakshasa or a monkey molesting or disfiguring a woman ; but Rama and Lakshmana have done it more than once : in respect of Rakshasi women indeed,—but you cannot call a woman a Rakshasi to insult her. Was it a crime in Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana, to love Rama or Lakshmana ? and what had she done to deserve the slitting of her ears and nose at the hands of these brothers ? What a contrast the treatment of Sita by Ravana,—and yet he is a monster and a Rakshasa ! Rama slays the monkey chief Vali without warning or cause, in order to secure the assistance of his brother Sugriva. Was Ravana guilty of a similar enormity ? *He* does not mind if his younger brother Vibhishana plays the traitor and joins Rama and betrays the secrets of Lanka's defences to the enemy. There is indeed a list of Ravana's misdeeds at the end of the Epic, but it has nothing to do with the story, and seems to have been an after thought, meant to justify his end. Then lastly, the treatment of Sita by Rama, his modest, gentle, loving wife and queen,—not once, but twice. She proves her chastity by passing through the ordeal of Fire, and lives with him for ten thousand years ; and then, when she is bearing the twins, comes the complaint of some non-descript people that, once upon a time, she had been a captive of Ravana.

When I read of her abandonment in the forest by Lakshmana, at the bidding of Rama, to find her way, alone and desolate, to the hermitage of Valmiki, tears filled my eyes, and I closed the book in sorrow and shame. The sorrow and sacrifice of Sita yet haunts me, and I cannot think of her without grief, and of Rama without shame. Tell me, can this Rama be a hero or a demi-god ? and can we read of him and honour him and worship him, and yet retain our self respect ? I sometimes think that many of the ills of the Hindus today are due to the worship of false heroes and gods. I feel that there is something wrong somewhere. If these books are really sacred, as they claim to be, they must have a different meaning, and we must understand it ; or, if their meaning be as it is, we must outgrow them, abjure them, and seek for truth elsewhere.

VALMIKI—This is indeed a terrible indictment. But the sacred books have stood the test of time, and will yet survive. You have your doubts and difficulties ; but they will be resolved. You have answered your own question yourself. These books are sacred, as they claim to be, and they have a meaning different from what is ordinarily understood. But you will know and understand. They are not stories in the vulgar sense of the term, but accounts of different systems of Philosophy and Religion in story-form.

MAHAVIR—Indeed ! My sister Mira says so too ; but no one seems to know what this may be.

VALMIKI—She has faith, and what she feels she thinks she knows. You are different. But you too will understand. Do you believe in God ?

MAHAVIR—There was a time when I did not believe in him. But I do so now. There is an eternal law of universal Goodness in the world, which operates individually as well collectively, and that personified is God. There is also the principle of Intelligence everywhere ; and the two together, functioning as self-restraint or Sacrifice, conduce to happiness and joy through all misery and pain. That is what I understand as God—conceived as Sat-chit-ananda ; and he is born in each deed of Goodness or Sacrifice, however great or small.

VALMIKI—That is the idea of an Incarnation of God—God spoken of as Sa-guna or possessed of qualities, and presented in a form man can understand. The human mind cannot think without an object ; and so, in order to think of God, it must present him as an object, clothe him in a form, and conceive of him as a Person with attributes ; and that is called an Incarnation. And, as this Being must do some good, deliberately, selflessly, and in a spirit of sacrifice, and bring joy to the world, he saves life from destruction, and so is called an Avatara or saviour, even as the word literally signifies.

MAHAVIR—So it is sacrifice that saves. I seem to remember something from the Gita :

Fettered by action is the world,
Save when performed as sacrifice.

VALMIKI—Yes, that is the idea of sacrifice—action that saves ; and an Avatara is a Man of Sacrifice, a saviour of life.

MAHAVIR—I am reminded of the Gita again :
Whenever, O thou of Bharata race,

There is decay of righteousness,
 And spreads unrighteousness around.
 Do I create myself again :
 For the deliverance of the good,
 And evil-doers to destroy,
 And 'stablish righteousness again,
 I am re-born from age to age.

Thus says Krishna in the Gita. You seem to say the same.

VALMIKI—All sacred books say the same thing : only the object or point of view is changed. Krishna is said to be a complete incarnation of Vishnu, the supreme Creator of the universe ; and so he should be a perfect embodiment of the idea of Sacrifice.

MAHAVIR—It would be strange—but I think I have read somewhere in the Upanishads about Krishna and sacrifice. Of course, it cannot have anything to do with the Krishna of the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana.

VALMIKI—That is in the Chhandogya Upanishad Let me tell you :

When Krishna, the son of Devaki,
 Learnt from the sage Ghora Angirasa
 The ancient truth of Sacrifice,
 He never sought for knowledge more,
 Saying, 'Behold the law of Life !
 Take refuge in the Truth, and see
 The ever present Light within—
 The oldest Seed of all the world.

The highest Light of all the lights,—
Above all darkness, like the Sun—
The highest Light within the heart.
The source of light among the gods,—
The highest Light,—the holiest Light.'

And it is the same Krishna, the son of Devaki, who figures in the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana.

MAHAVIR—That is extraordinary. Are not the Upanishads earlier than these books ? How could the same man live in periods said to be ages apart ?

VALMIKI—Krishna is not a man like you or me. He is the highest Person—an embodiment of the most perfect idea of Sacrifice, who, even as you said, is born from age to age, to establish righteousness, happiness and truth

MAHAVIR—Now I remember. The name of Krishna occurs in the Ramayana too, though this Epic is said to have been composed long before the Mahabharata. And so the same Person appears and reappears in different sacred books because he represents the same idea throughout ?

VALMIKI—Yes. That is why you find different gods and sages,—Brahma, Mahadeva and Vishnu,—Varuna, Agni and Indra—Visvamitra, Vasishtha and Narada—figuring again and again in all the sacred books of the Hindus.

MAHAVIR—That is interesting ; but I feel so confused—almost baffled. Why do we have so many gods, when only one would suffice,—call him Vishnu, Krishna or Sat-chit-ananda, as you will ?

VALMIKI—You said that there was a time when you did not believe in God, and then something happened, and you came to believe in him. Tell me what was this.

MAHAVIR—It were a long story to tell. I used to believe in Nature as the sole supreme creator of the universe. Then I realised that all human action had something positive for its end,—some pleasure or profit, some satisfaction or good as we might call it, and was intended to avoid its opposite, evil or dissatisfaction, loss or pain; and that the latter was due to the Law of Change, which governs all Nature. Hence there was a conflict between the object of a man's action and the character of Nature itself, and the two could not be reconciled if Nature was the sole supreme creator of all life. If it was of the essence of man always to seek for his own happiness or good, and if that end was as constantly frustrated by Nature, Nature could not have created man or at least that purpose in his heart. Hence it was necessary for him to go beyond Nature to seek for the fulfilment of his end or goal; and that idealised was to me God in his unmanifest form. Then I realised that unhappiness was due not merely to the Law of Change in Nature but also to the selfishness of man, and that selfless action made for freedom and joy; and that Nature, being universal, could itself be regarded as selfless, if we could think of it as intelligent too. And then it dawned on me that if we could believe Nature to be the creator of so intelligent a being as man, and if its great forces operated in accordance with great universal laws, it could not but be regarded as intelligent itself. In this way I understood the idea of Sacrifice as good, selfless and intelligent action, and saw how a man, performing such action in a world of sorrow

and change, could still be happy and free ; and this idealised gave me the idea of God in his manifest form—a Being all whose actions are an unending Sacrifice. I recognised, however, that it was possible to conceive of different degrees of Sacrifice, and that might give us different ideas of God. In any case, I think we understand the essential idea of God when Nature itself comes to be conceived in terms of Sacrifice.

VALMIKI—Yes, it were a long story to tell. We must begin with Nature, and then, by slow and gradual stages of thought, transform it into God by means of the idea of Sacrifice ; and it is this Sacrifice of Sita that constitutes the essence of the Ramayana. You spoke of the great forms and forces of Nature : it is they and the different degrees of their association with the idea of Sacrifice that are personified as the gods of the Hindus, of whom you read in the sacred books. Will you call them too many now ?

MAHAVIR—I am confused. I wish I could believe it. It seems almost too good to be true. Can you prove all that you say ?

VALMIKI—Have patience. The sacred books are ancient works and there is an ancient method of interpreting them—lost through the long lapse of years. It is the key that can unlock their secret. We who dwell here, believe that we have discovered it, and have worked out the principal texts in its light ; and you too will understand if you have the patience to learn. You know the elements of Sanskrit, don't you ?

MAHAVIR—Yes, a little.

VALMIKI—You will understand, Sanskrit is the language of these books, and it is the one language in the world unconnected with any country, people or race. It is a universal language, perfected and purified, even as its name signifies—the language of science, philosophy, and religion,—of life itself. Each letter, each syllable in this language, as it is used in the ancient books, has its own meaning and significance ; and it is in this light that the names of gods and men and the idea of their actions have to be understood. The gods of the Vedas personify the great forces of Nature in terms of creative energy or Sacrifice ; and what is described in the Vedas is explained in the Upanishads. The Upanishads give rise to the different systems of Philosophy ; and these have been arranged to form the different systems of Religion ; while the Epics of Ramayana and the Mahabharata as well as the Puranas deal with all these in Story-form.

MAHAVIR—This would indeed be a fascinating theory or invention. But can it be proved in a way to carry conviction ?

VALMIKI—A theory is a way of looking at a problem, phenomenon, or a series of facts, which need to be solved or explained ; and it seeks to explain them on the basis of a general principle, formula or an ideal conception ; and then many facts, apparently unconnected, are seen to be closely allied. You have stated the problem of Hinduism and its sacred books. You are confused ; you are baffled ; you find conflict of principles, inconsistencies of conduct, incongruities of thought. One denies the existence of Nature, another of God, while a third affirms both. Brahma, the chief of the Hindu triad or Trimurty, survives but in his

name; Buddha, an incarnation of Vishnu, is hardly a believer in God, and his religion has disappeared from the land of its birth ; atheism and agnosticism may be included in Hinduism, but not necessarily belief in God ; a young woman is shocked by the doings of sages and holy men, and a young man may hold up the actions of gods to derision and scorn. And yet all these books are spoken of as sacred, and a great deal of what they say appears to bear the stamp of truth and has surprised many a man of learning. But no one is able to explain how all this may be. Now, if you can assume certain fundamental principles of life ; explain, on the basis of ancient authority, the meaning of the actions of men and gods through the letters and syllables composing the text ; and find, in the light of this, consistency in place of contradiction, philosophy in place of falsehood, and truth in place of trickery, throughout—would you regard such a theory as fanciful or a mere invention of a fertile brain ?

MAHAVIR—If your theory is based on fundamental principles of life ; if it can be shown to be consistent throughout the whole range of the sacred books ; and if, in the domain of philosophy and religion, it can explain what has never before been understood, and reconcile inconsistencies and incongruities of thought and action, it will cease to be a theory—it will become a fact, a self-evident truth. But can this be done ? and so far as the Epics are concerned, can you explain them both as stories and accounts of philosophy running side by side ?

VALMIKI Woven into the fabric of life, like warp and woof !

MAHAVIR—There is nothing in the world I would not give to know this. But you will pardon me. If only I could have

a foretaste of what is to follow ; if only you could explain, in the broadest outline, what puzzles me in the Ramayana ; I could wait for a fuller explanation till it pleases you to tell me more.

VALMIKI—That is a fair demand. You believed in Nature once as the sole supreme creator of the universe, and then slowly passed into belief in God. Let us begin with Nature then ; or, what perhaps will be simpler still, with Man as the most wonderful creation of Nature. And if man may be said to have been created by Nature, you will agree that all the forces that go make him must already exist in Nature in one form or another.

MAHAVIR—I think so. But it is so difficult to say what man is.

VALMIKI—Let us try. You know that he has his senses of knowledge and action ; a mind that thinks ; reason to understand, form judgments and distinguish between right and wrong ; and yet something more, which is sometimes spoken of as consciousness or soul.

MAHAVIR—I have read something about this. There are five senses of knowledge and five of action ; the ears, skin, eyes, tongue, and the nose are the senses of knowledge ; while the legs, arms, tongue, the organ of creation and the organ of excretion are the five senses of action. Each of these is said to have a special attribute of its own. The ear is sensitive to sound, skin to touch, eye to light or form, tongue to taste, and the nose to smell. Similarly the legs are for motion, arms for action, the tongue for speech, and the urinary and excretory organs have their special functions too. I know something about the mind and the faculty of reason ; but I do not know the exact difference between them.

VALMIKI—I will tell you. All knowledge has a twofold aspect—with reference to the knower and the object to be known. When a man comes into contact with an object in the physical world and desires to know what it is, he must inquire about it. Even where the question refers to an idea or an abstraction, it must have a bearing on the physical world. And then, as he pursues his quest, there comes an answer to his inquiry, partial and incomplete perhaps at first, and then, slowly and gradually, through a series of questions and answers, he comes to a conclusion about it. This is what is called knowledge. Thus there are two stages in this process: a question and an answer, continued till there is nothing further to ask. That faculty in man which desires for and asks questions about an object is said to be the Mind; while that which answers or understands is said to be Buddhi or Intelligence, Reason or Understanding.

MAHAVIR—This seems simple enough. But are not the two closely allied ?

VALMIKI—Yes; but it is possible to distinguish between them. The Mind desires, thinks, asks a question or raises a doubt; while Buddhi or Intelligence answers the question, resolves the doubt, and makes for certainty and satisfaction.

MAHAVIR—I follow. But what about Consciousness or Soul ? Is it the same thing as Buddhi or Mind ?

VALMIKI—That is a little more difficult to explain; but you will understand. I think you will agree that there is something within us which seems to be specially connected with the Heart on the one hand and breath on the other. When the heart stops, a man dies; and he expires when he ceases to breathe. This breath is not merely air,

for then an air pump would be enough to keep a man alive. It is air plus something ; and that Something is called by different names—higher Consciousness or Soul. It pervades the whole body of man, through breath or circulation of the blood ; but it is specially connected with the heart, so that when its link with the heart is broken, the heart stops, the breath goes out, and the man dies. The Soul may be said to be seated in the living breath, and, through it, it acts on the whole body. When it is associated with the senses, they perform their respective functions ; when it is associated with the Mind, it desires, thinks or asks a question ; and when it is associated with Buddhi, it resolves the doubts of the Mind, and makes for certainty and peace.

MAHAVIR—Am I to understand that the places of Buddhi, Mind, and the senses are fixed, while it is the Soul, seated in the vital breath, that ranges through all and makes them act ?

VALMIKI—Yes. The senses of knowledge and action have their fixed places in the body, as you know. Even so have Buddhi and Mind. The brain is divided into two parts, the upper and the lower one ; the former is the seat of Buddhi, the latter of the Mind. And through the whole body of man, from the crown of the head to the toes of the feet, ranges that subtle being—call it higher Consciousness or Soul, or by whatever name you will—and makes them perform their different functions. But it is specially connected with the Heart, which alone feels pleasure or pain. It rises from the heart to the head, and comes down to the senses, and then a man is awake and acts. But when he is tired and needs rest, it passes out of the senses into the Mind and then he dreams ; and when it passes into Buddhi, he sleeps

soundly ; and when it goes back into the heart, he has perfect rest, unbroken by anything. This is the course of wakefulness and sleep. But when it departs from the body, with the departure of the vital breath, the heart stops and the man dies, and all the organs of the body, though intact, cease to function too.

MAHAVIR—This is very interesting. The brain is said to be divided into parts, and there are men of science today who regard it as the centre of consciousness and will and the functions of the different organs of the body. Psychologists too speak of sensations and perceptions, thought with its twofold character, speech and image, of judgments, and feelings of pleasure and pain. But all this is so modern. Is what you say contained in the ancient books ?

VALMIKI—All this is ancient knowledge, contained in the ancient books.

MAHAVIR—What you say about dreams is equally interesting. But I am not sure if I can accept all that you say. But what has this to do with my question about the character of Hinduism and its sacred books, specially the *Ramayana* ?

VALMIKI—If the sacred books are an account of Philosophy in story form, we must understand the basic truths of this philosophy, this science of life,—of Nature and man ; and it is a simple plan to begin with man. Now let us pass on to Nature and assume that it creates man and all that is in him. This means that all the forces of life in man, including higher Consciousness or Soul, must already exist in Nature in one form or another.

MAHAVIR—I think it follows.

VALMIKI—The ancients held that Nature is a vast and wonderful collection of energy or force, and is unmanifest in its ultimate form. When it becomes manifest, its first form is Mahat or Buddhi, and its great physical form in our world is the Sun. Out of this arises the universal Mind, whose corresponding form is the Moon. This, in its turn, gives rise to five great elemental forces—Ether Air, Fire, Water and Earth—each with a special attribute of its own—sound or motion, touch, sight or form, taste and smell respectively. At the same time arise out of the elements the five senses of knowledge and five of action, as you have heard. All these have their place in the constitution of man. All are agreed on this ; but some, like you, had their doubts about the character of Consciousness or Soul. But if Nature be the sole supreme creator of the universe, the individual Soul, or by whatever name you call it, must be a creation of Nature too. Those who hold this view believe that there is no Soul, but only an Ego or Ahankara—an entity that acts within each individual. They maintain that after Mahat or Buddhi arises out of Nature, the individual Ego or Ahankara arises out of Buddhi, before the Mind comes into existence. Accordingly it is said to have an intermediate place between Buddhi or Intelligence and the Mind ; and it is this that is characterized by lower consciousness or the incessant action and interaction of Buddhi and Mind, or question and answer, doubt and certainty, in connection with the objects of life. And so it is said to act in conjunction with the different organs and energies of the human frame.

MAHAVIR—This is fascinating. Does it mean that we can eliminate the Soul in this way ? What is this system that conceived of this ingenious plan ?

VALMIKI—It is the Sankhya system, the lowest at the rung of Hindu thought.

MAHAVIR—What is wrong with this system ? It seems so simple. If the problem of the Soul causes so much confusion, why not eliminate it and put Ahankara or Egoism in its place ?

VALMIKI—Philosophy has to face, not fly away from difficulties of thought. Let us see. If you accept Nature as the sole supreme creator of the universe, what follows ?

MAHAVIR—Death !—for Nature is characterized by the Law of Change, which makes for sorrow, disease, and death. All human actions are intended to secure satisfaction, happiness or good,—individual or collective ; but the action of Nature, through its great forces and Time, seems to frustrate this, bringing about the end of everything in death. To be happy, therefore, man must refrain from all action, that is, cease to exist.

VALMIKI—But man does not wish to die; he wishes to live.

MAHAVIR—Yes ; and so he cannot agree that Nature is the sole supreme creator of the universe. As he wishes to live and be happy, he is forced to believe in a Being who lives beyond Nature and is happy ; and that is the goal of man—a world of life in God beyond the bounds of Nature.

VALMIKI—But if there is an entity in man which, for its own fulfilment, seeks a place outside Nature, it follows that it could not have been created by Nature—for Nature cannot create anything outside its forces and forms.

Hence the necessity of the idea of the Soul, as something different from and independent of Nature, corresponding to the idea of God ; and the Sankhya itself is compelled to admit the necessity of the existence of purusha or the individual being, who seeks to be free from the trammels of Nature or Prakriti.

MAHAVIR—This is fascinating. What happens then to Egoism or Ahankara ?

VALMIKI—It has its proper place in the make up of man,—between Buddhi and Mind ; and so when the individual Soul functions in connection with both Buddhi and Mind,—that is, when a man desires and thinks, and there arise within him a series of questions and answers in regard to an object, and certain knowledge or satisfaction has not been gained—this state may be said to be that of Ego or Ahankara. Since all processes of thought and action may be resolved into a series of questions and answers, and it is this that constitutes the basis of lower consciousness, all functions of the mind and the faculty of reason in connection with the different forms of thought and action may be referred to Ego or Ahankara. Thus it is conceived as the chief actor in the world,—as the *I-in-action*, as the word literally signifies.

MAHAVIR—You have an extraordinary way of explaining things. What then is the relation of this Ahankara to the Soul ?

VALMIKI—When the Soul realises its true character as something different from all objects of Nature, and all forms and forces created by it—Buddhi, Ahankara, Mind, and the senses

—it attains higher Consciousness and becomes free from the bondage of Nature ; and all its actions become a Sacrifice ; and, living and acting in a world of change, it is unaffected by sorrow and grief. This is what is meant by the “destruction” of Egoism or Ahankara, of which you read in Hindu philosophy; and this is rendered in the Mahabharata as the “slaughter of Abhimanyu ”; for Abhimanyu means literally Abhimana, Egoism or Ahankara. Arjuna in the Epic is the human Soul, seeking to realise and perfect itself; and, as Abhimana or Egoism is an aspect of the Soul, even so is Abhimanyu the son of Arjuna, and he has to be “ slain.”

MAHAVIR—This baffles me. Is this the idea of Abhimanyu, his father and mother and all those who are connected with him throughout in the Mahabharata ? And can you explain this as well ?

VALMIKI—Even so. I know the explanation, but you must go to my brother Vyasa for a detailed account of the whole. Now you understand the necessity of the idea of the Soul as distinct from Egoism or Ahankara ?

MAHAVIR—I think I do. But I am so confused. May I ask what is the idea of the Chakra Vyuha or Circular Array, into which Abhimanyu could enter, but out of which he did not know how to escape ? His enemies surrounded him, and it was then that he was slain.

VALMIKI—The word Chakra in Sanskrit is derived from the root “kri”, which means “to act”; and so “Chakra Vyuha” really means “the array of action”. The same root occurs in the word Ahankara, which means literally, “I-in-action”—and that is the exact idea of Abhimana, Egoism or

Ahankara. Thus, when the individual Soul engages in action, other than as a Sacrifice, it is called Ahankara ; and it can enter this " array of action " or Chakra Vyuha, but cannot get out of it ;—for all actions, other than Sacrifice, are fetters that bind, as the Gita says. Thus, so long as Abhimanyu retains his character as Abhimana or Egoism, he can enter but not get out of the Chakra Vyuha, or the " array of action."

MAHAVIR—This is amazing. Is this the idea of the word Chakra elsewhere in the epic too? Krishna is said to hold the Sudarsana Chakra : what may this mean?

VALMIKI—The word Sudarsana in Sanskrit means " beautiful and good", and Chakra means " action ", as I have explained. Krishna is the most perfect incarnation or embodiment of the idea of God, and that arises out of Sacrifice or good actions. All the actions of Krishna must, therefore, be beautiful and good ; and that is signified by his Sudarsana Chakra. And it is said that whenever he discharged it, it always came back to him ;—for all acts of goodness return to the doer in increased goodness again : that is the law of life.

MAHAVIR—This is wonderful. Pray go on. I wish to know more.

VALMIKI—Now you understand the various energies and organs that go to make up man; and all, except the Soul, are to be found in the different forms and forces of Nature or Prakriti. The Soul is different, and has its archetype in God. Now it is the different energies and organs and the forms and forces of Nature, together with the different stages in the conception of

a perfect Soul, that are personified as the Gods of the Vedas ; and the different ways in which they act,—now together, now apart, now in concert, now in conflict—are described in the hymns addressed to them. This is the ancient knowledge of Life,—the Vidya of old, that is Veda ; and as this knowledge is eternal, so are the Vedas said to be.

MAHAVIR—This is amazing. Can you prove this too ?

VALMIKI—You must go to Visvamitra for a detailed explanation of the Vedas. For the present you should be satisfied that if a particular god of the Vedas is associated with a particular idea, he should represent the same throughout the range of the sacred books; and they should explain and amplify the actions attributed to him. For instance, there are the two Asvins : they are said to be twins, and described as Horses. Now the " Horse " is explained in the Upanishads as referring to the " senses " in man ; and there are two kinds of senses,—of knowledge and of action—said to have been created simultaneously, that is, as twins. Thus, whenever we get the Asvins in the sacred books, they should refer to these twin senses of knowledge and action ; and, indeed, as it is the senses that are said to have been created as " twins ", wherever we get the " twins " they should refer to these senses of knowledge and action. This should be the idea of the twins Lakshmana and Satrugna, the sons of Dasaratha, as well as of Kusa and Lava, the sons of Rama, in the Ramayana ; and also of Nakula and Sahadeva in the Mahabharata. The idea may be varied in detail according to the circumstances of each case, but the essential meaning must be the same.

MAHAVIR—I am almost overwhelmed, and do not know what to say. If the same is true of all the gods and other characters throughout, I do not see how we can reject this explanation. But did you not say that the meaning of the names is given in the names themselves? In that case they should be self-explanatory.

VALMIKI—Yes ; but if the names and actions support each other, the whole thing would be irrefutable.

MAHAVIR—You have a high standard and a difficult task. Can you give me some more instances of this kind ?

VALMIKI— Indra is another great god of the Vedas, and many are the hymns addressed to him. The word Indra is connected with another Sanskrit word, Indriya, which means "the senses". Now in the Upanishads the word Prana signifies not only the senses, but also the Mind, Buddhi, and the individual Soul ; for it is the Soul, seated in the vital breath—which is another meaning of Prana—that functions through all these. Again, Indra is explained in the Upanishads as identified with Prajnatman or the self-conscious Soul, attaining to perfection when he realises his character as such. The god Indra refers, therefore, to the individual Soul, which functions in connection with the various organs and energies of man, and slowly realises its true character as Soul. This should be the character of Indra in all sacred books. Now Arjuna in the Mahabharata is said to be the son of Indra ; and so he too must refer to the same thing—for father and son are often identified in the sacred books ; that is, he represents the individual Soul, rising from its association with the senses to the Mind, Buddhi, and finally to its own character as Soul.

MAHAVIR—I am almost dazed. But pray go on. I should like to know something about the Ramayan now.

VALMIKI—Let us go on. You said that you had been converted to belief in God some time ago. But the whole idea of God is not easy to comprehend.

MAHAVIR—Yes, indeed ; and that is why I am still groping for light.

VALMIKI—Have patience. There are many stages of thought from belief in Nature to belief in God as the sole surpreme creator of the universe. We think of him at first in his unmanifest form, as living beyond the world of Nature ; and then in his manifest form, as living in this world, and acting as in Sacrifice. But Sacrifice may be partial or complete ; and, as at each stage man gets a fuller idea of Sacrifice, his idea of God becomes more comprehensive too ; till, with a perfect idea of Sacrifice, he understands the most perfect idea of God as the sole supreme creator of the universe, as Sat-chit-ananda—God as eternal and good, intelligent, and happy.

MAHAVIR—I follow.

VALMIKI—Now there are three principal ways of looking at the problem of ultimates. We may hold that Nature alone is the creator of life ; or that it is God alone who creates ; or that the two together create the universe.

MAHAVIR—This is simple logic, I believe.

VALMIKI—You see that a person may believe that Nature is the creator of the universe ; but he need not deny the existence of God. So long as it is agreed that it is Nature that is

supreme, he may be satisfied. There may, thus, be three ways of looking at the problem in this case : one, that Nature is the sole supreme creator of the universe ; two, that if God exists, he is either a mere spectator of the work of Nature, or, if he creates, he has done so for the first and last time, and has nothing more to do, and Nature goes on in accordance with its own laws ; and three, that even if he acts more frequently, his actions are of a comparatively minor character and subordinate to those of Nature or Prakriti.

MAHAVIR—This seems logical too.

VALMIKI—Now when a person believes in Nature as the sole creator of life, and finds that there is no escape from its law of action or change, and its consequent misery, pain and death, he is forced to the conclusion that, in order to be happy, he must desist from all action, which is born of Nature—that is, cease to be. In other words, there is no room for any action or Sacrifice in this belief.

MAHAVIR—Yes. I understood this when I came to believe in God. He who believes in Nature, believes in death ; and he who wishes to live, must believe in God.

VALMIKI—Yes. When a person holds that God is more or less a spectator of the work of Nature, his belief in action or Sacrifice is correspondingly limited too. In other words, he believes that life is a necessary evil ; that we have to perform actions, even those as a Sacrifice, in order to exist ; but that is not our goal, and we must renounce them as soon as we can in order to achieve happiness. Even if he

holds that God acts in a small way, he would only admit that we should perform necessary actions or acts of Sacrifice more willingly ; but his goal would still be the same—that is, renunciation as soon as may be. Thus, we believe in renunciation of action in proportion to our belief in Nature as the creator of the universe ; and in Sacrifice in proportion to our belief in God.

MAHAVIR—Yes, I agree.

VALMIKI—This is the ancient system of thought associated with the name of Brahma. Its three points of view have been classified into two divisions, which, in later times, have come to be called by the names of Jainism and Buddhism. The first is sub-divided into two parts,—the Digambara and the Svetambara—the one holding that Nature is the sole supreme creator of life, and the other that, if God exists, he is a mere spectator of Nature's work.

MAHAVIR—I thought that the difference between them was that the one holds that we should not wear any clothes, and the other that we should.

VALMIKI—Yes ; but the idea is more comprehensive. In order to live, the most necessary things are food, shelter and clothes, and we must act to provide them. If a person does not believe in action or in God, he must refrain from food, shelter as well as clothes ; and this is the immediate objective of the Digambara school. The Svetambara believes in God and Sacrifice in a small way, and so believes that we should have necessary food, shelter and clothes so long as we live. But this is all theoretical.

The realities of life have taught the advocates of the Digambara that no one can live without food, or even shelter of some sort; but it seems possible to dispense with much clothing in a country like India. Hence the distinction between the two in respect of wearing clothes; and it is this that is represented in the sacred books when Draupadi is unrobed or Krishna takes away the clothes of the Gopis.

UMA—This is extraordinary. I should like to know this.

VALMIKI—Have patience. Let me go on now to Buddhism.

It too has its two divisions—the Hinayana and the Mahayana—the former almost identical with the Svetambara school of Jainism, and the latter holding that God is a minor, and Nature the major, creator of the universe. Thus we have all the three points of view of the school of Brahma analysed more simply and clearly in this way.

MAHAVIR—Can all this be proved from the sacred books themselves?

VALMIKI—Yes. You get this idea of Brahma in the Puranas; while the idea of Buddhism and Jainism can be understood from the sacred books dealing with these systems. You will find that Brahma is the deity of both.

MAHAVIR—Is that the reason why, with the disappearance of Buddha, the name of Brahma too has all but disappeared?

VALMIKI—Yes.

MAHAVIR—But why was Buddhism driven out of India ? and why has Jainism, with its denial, and doubt in the very existence, of God, been allowed to survive ?

VALMIKI—Buddhism was absorbed in the other systems, as you will presently see, and not driven out, as you have been told. That will also explain why Jainism cannot be absorbed, and must remain a separate system.

MAHAVIR—I am impatient to know more. May I now ask what is the idea of Ravana as a descendant of Brahma ?

VALMIKI—That means that he represents the system of Brahma, that is, belief in Nature as the chief creator of life, giving but a small and limited place to Sacrifice and God. But let us proceed, and you will understand more presently. We have dealt with the system of thought with Nature as the chief creator of life. If now we believe that Nature and God together create the universe, we shall again have three points of view : one, that the share of Nature is greater than that of God ; two, that both of them are equal ; and three, that the share of God is greater than that of Nature. This is the range of thought associated with the name of Siva or Mahadeva.

MAHAVIR—This seems logical too. Is this also borne out by the sacred books ?

VALMIKI—Yes ; and you will find the different schools of this system still in existence in the country.

MAHAVIR—What is the connection between the system of Brahma and that of Mahadeva ?

VALMIKI—You will see that the first aspect of the system of Mahadeva, namely, that the share of Nature is greater than that of God, coincides with the last of the system of Brahma, and is identical with the Mahayana school of Buddhism ; and that is the connection between them. This means that when you attain to the last stage of the school of Brahma, you pass on to that of Mahadeva ; and so the one serves as a stepping stone to the other. Now you will understand how the two schools of Buddhism were absorbed—the Hinayana in the Svetambara school of Jainism, with which it coincides, and the Mahayana in the corresponding school of Mahadeva.

MAHAVIR—This is strange. We have been taught to believe that Buddhism was driven out of India, and is now to be found only beyond the mountains and the seas.

VALMIKI—You will still find many of its principles and practices in some forms of Saivism and the Svetambara school of Jainism.

MAHAVIR—You will pardon me for asking so many questions. But, if Buddhism has been absorbed, as you say, and not driven out, why has Jainism been allowed to remain, even though it does not countenance belief in a God who creates ?

VALMIKI—All knowledge is from the known to the unknown ; and so you must rise from belief in Nature to belief in God. And so Jainism, with its denial and doubt, is the foundation of all belief in God, and must remain as a separate system,—not as an end in itself, but as a stepping stone to others. It is for this reason that we have

the Saiva and Vaishnava forms of Jainism still in existence to this day.

MAHAVIR—If Hinduism is such a wonderful system of thought and life, why does it exclude Christianity and Islam, which believe in God almost as much as Vedanta, the culmination of all that is in our religion ?

VALMIKI—Unless, in your quest of Truth, you begin from the bottom of the scale, with denial and doubt, and ascend, by slow degrees of thought, from an apprehension of the great forces of Nature to Sacrifice and belief in God—you cannot have an intelligent or scientific idea of God or religion. Christianity and Islam do not fit into this scheme. They rely on faith more than reason for their belief. Christianity, in its idea of the Trinity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, as well as Immaculate Conception and Virgin Motherhood, has indeed a philosophy and symbolism of its own, akin to that of Hinduism ; but its significance has been forgotten and lost. Islam is the simplest and, therefore, the most difficult religion in the world, for it has tried to escape all problems of thought in its system. Christianity and Islam are like the flower and fruit, without the roots and foliage of thought. Hinduism consists of both, and that is the difference between them. If you deny God, and ask Christianity or Islam to say why we should believe in him, they are silent and cannot answer : Hinduism can.

MAHAVIR—I understand. It is this that taught me to rise from Nature to God. How different is all that you say from what we have learnt !

VALMIKI—You will have to unlearn a few more things. Now let us consider the problem in the light of God as the chief creator of life. Here again there are three points of view: one, that the share of God is more than that of Nature; two, that Nature exists, but as a spectator of the work of God; and three, that Nature is not a separate entity but a creation of God himself. This is the threefold range of the system of Vishnu, called Dvaita, Visishtadvaita and Advaita, or dualism, qualified monism, and pure monism of God.

MAHAVIR—This appears to be the very opposite of the system of Brahma.

VALMIKI—Yes.

MAHAVIR—And yet Brahma, Mahadeva, and Vishnu are said to constitute the great Trinity, or three forms of one God. How can that be if one of them excludes the other? All this is so strange.

VALMIKI—Things which appear to be strange are often seen to be strangely consistent. You have understood the connection between the systems of Brahma and Mahadeva. Now understand that between the systems of Mahadeva and Vishnu. You will find that the third aspect of the system of Mahadeva, namely, that the share of God is greater than that of Nature, is identical with the first of Vishnu; and so when you attain to the last stage of the one, you pass on to the other.

MAHAVIR—I am beginning to perceive the connection between the systems of Brahma and Vishnu now.

VALMIKI—Yes, you will understand. Although the system of Brahma appears to exclude that of Vishnu, it is a stepping stone to that of Mahadeva, and the latter to that of Vishnu ; and so they are all but different stages of thought in understanding the ultimate Reality. That is the idea of Trimurty or three forms of one God. All knowledge is from the known to the unknown. We must begin with the world of the manifest, that is, Nature, and then slowly rise to the unknown or God ; and so it is the system of Brahma at the base that makes it possible for us to understand the idea of Mahadeva or Vishnu.

MAHAVIR—I think I understand. I had not thought of this before.

VALMIKI—Yes ; but it is possible for those who do not understand the idea of the whole, to regard the system of Brahma as opposed to that of Vishnu.

MAHAVIR—I am puzzled : yet a light dawns on me. Is that the cause of the conflict between Ravana and Rama,—the one a descendant of Brahma, and the other an incarnation of Vishnu ?

VALMIKI—Yes. You have guessed rightly. Now you will understand.

MAHAVIR—Pray proceed. I wish to know more. But did you not say that there was a connection between the systems of Philosophy and Religion too.

VALMIKI—Yes. I shall explain only the basic idea. For details you must go to Angirasa, who will teach you the Upanishads too.

MAHAVIR—I am all attention.

VALMIKI—We began our systems of Philosophy with man ; let us go back to him again. He has his Soul, Buddhi or Intelligence, Mind, and the twin-born senses of knowledge and action. Then, in order to live, he must have food to eat.

MAHAVIR—The Gita says so too : all creatures live by food.

VALMIKI—Yes. But Food in its comprehensive sense is as wide as Nature itself ; for all the great forces of Nature come into play in the creation of each little grain of corn. It is they that make food ; and then it is transformed into blood, and builds up the tissues, bones and brain, and gives rise to the vital energy of man which is the physical basis of his creative power. Now you will understand how the system of Philosophy based on the idea of Nature as the sole creator of life, is identical with that based on Food ; and that is the Sankhya system.

MAHAVIR—I understand. The whole thing is so fascinating.

VALMIKI—You have understood how, if we believe in this system, we must reject all life as an evil, and put an end to it as soon as we can ; but if we wish to live, we must believe in Sacrifice, which constitutes the basis of the idea of God ?

MAHAVIR—Yes.

VALMIKI—That enables us to pass on to the next system of Philosophy, Nyaya. Nyaya means literally a law ; and

it gives us a very simple idea of God, as a Being who exists indeed—for to deny him would be to deny life itself—but in accordance with a law ; and he is but a spectator of Nature, who creates in accordance with its own law ; or, if God has a share in creation, it is very small indeed ; and having created once, he has little more to do, and Nature goes on in its own way.

MAHAVIR—This is an extraordinary conception of God.

VALMIKI—Yes ; but it is only by slow degrees that we can attain to a full conception of the deity ; and this, after denying him altogether, is a great step forward.

MAHAVIR—I understand.

VALMIKI—Now let us go down to man again. We have dealt with his connection with food and its relation to the corresponding system of Philosophy, the Sankhya. We find that at the bottom of his organs and energies are the senses ; and so in the corresponding system, Nyaya, we try and understand the whole problem of life in the light of what the senses can perceive. This would give us a strictly limited view ; but, within its limits, it would be comprehensive. The senses can understand their own character and that of food, but not what is above or beyond them ; and to them all such organs or faculties would appear only as senses. The Mind would seem to be a sense ; so too Buddhi or intelligence ; and even so the Soul.

MAHAVIR—Does this system regard the Mind, Buddhi and the Soul as senses ? Surely they are different.

VALMIKI—You must understand the point of view it takes. As in the Sankhya we regard the whole in the light of

Nature or the creative energy of food, even so in Nyaya we regard the whole in the light of the senses, and all things appear to conform to this pattern. Then we realise our error, and pass on to the next system of Philosophy.

MAHAVIR—What is the error in this system ?

VALMIKI—As in the Sankhya we realise that there is something within us - call it Spirit or Soul—that is not born of Nature, even so we now recognise that the Soul is not a sense of knowledge or action, even though it may function in connection with them. Nor can we accept the idea of God as a mere spectator of the work of Nature, or limit the range of Sacrifice or necessary action, as we must in this system. We find that its goal of life is almost the same as that of the Sankhya : action is still a necessary evil, and the less we act, the nearer are we to salvation. We may perform the most necessary actions indeed - eat food, wear clothes, and have some shelter too ; but the less we have even of these the better would it be ; and we must stop as soon after them as possible. Celibacy is extolled as an ideal, and we are enjoined to spend our time in meditation and the pursuit of knowledge.

MAHAVIR—I can understand meditation and knowledge ; but I thought marriage was a fundamental law of life.

VALMIKI—It is this that takes us to the next system, Vaiseshika, based on the conception of the union of God and Nature, corresponding to that of man and woman, in the creation of life. God is spoken of as Purusha or man, and Nature as woman, and they have both their own part to play. The share of Nature may be more than that of God,

or the two may be equal, or the share of God may be more than that of Nature : it is even as we may imagine between man and woman in married life.

MAHAVIR—This is interesting. But is not this identical with the system of Mahadeva ? The other systems seem to have something in common with it too.

VALMIKI—Yes. The Vaiseshika is the meeting place of all systems of Hindu religion, and is specially important on that account. If you understand it aright, you can grasp the different points of agreement and opposition between the various systems of Philosophy and Religion.

MAHAVIR—Is it then different from Sankhya and Nyaya ? or does it too, like them, examine the whole problem from a particular point of view ?

VALMIKI—Yes, from the point of view of the Mind—the next faculty above the senses in man. The Mind can comprehend its own character and that of the senses below it, but not of Buddhi and the Soul above ; and so it regards them both as partaking of the character of the Mind.

MAHAVIR—Does it believe that the Soul is like the Mind ?

VALMIKI—Yes ; and it is because of this error that we must pass on to the next system, that is Yoga.

MAHAVIR—Is there any other error in the Vaiseshika system ?

VALMIKI—Yes. All forms of life are not created by the physical union of the male and the female. For instance, the Sun creates by means of its own power ; and there are forms of

life where the mere presence of the male near the female is enough to set into operation the forces of creation. Nor need the male and female be regarded as equal or almost equal. And so in the Yoga system God is conceived as the chief creator of the universe, and Nature as either a spectator of his work, or but a very minor creator of life.

MAHAVIR—This seems to be the very opposite of Nyaya. Has Yoga also a special point of view of its own ?

VALMIKI—Yes : it looks at all things in the light of Buddhi, the next faculty above the Mind ; and Buddhi can understand itself, and the character of the Mind and the senses below it, but not of the Soul that lies above ; and so it regards the Soul as identical with itself.

MAHAVIR—How extraordinary ! But if the special character of Buddhi, as explained by you, is certainty of knowledge and peace, is not the Soul specially connected with it ? I have read somewhere that the Soul may, for practical purposes, be identified with Buddhi. That seems sensible.

VALMIKI—If you examine the problem in the light of the Yoga system, you will hold this view. That is the point of view of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata, and you will find this stated in that Epic.

MAHAVIR—Yes, I remember. Is that the reason why the Bhagavad Gita too is described as a treatise on Yoga ?

VALMIKI—Yes.

MAHAVIR—I believe Yoga at least is free from error, or is it also incomplete ?

VALMIKI—Yoga understands the character of Buddhi and all that lies below it, that is, the Mind and the senses ; but not of the Soul. And then its idea of God is not complete. If Nature exists even as a spectator of the work of God—who is the creator of this Nature ? And so we must pass on to the next system, Vedanta—the ultimate analysis of all ancient knowledge—which tells us that God is the one supreme creator of the universe, including all that we understand by Nature ; and corresponding to him there is the Soul in man.

MAHAVIR—This is truly wonderful. And so we rise from the senses to the Soul or from Sankhya to Vedanta in this way ! But what is the special character of the Soul in Vedanta, as distinguished from Buddhi, Mind, and the senses ?

VALMIKI—The Soul is seated in the vital breath, and is characterized by knowledge and action both, for with every breath we draw we know and act at the same time. Thus it is the Soul that functions through all the organs of the body ; and it is the Soul that feels pleasure and pain. When it functions in connection with any organ—be it Buddhi, Egoism, Mind, or the senses—it is identified with it for the time being and is called by that name ; and it is for this reason that we can do only one thing at a time. But it can also withdraw itself from all these, and then it becomes the Soul once more, and knows itself. Thus the ancients described Buddhi, Mind, senses and food as sheaths or cases that enwrap the Soul. The Soul is the same in all beings ; and it is only the difference in the make up of his other organs and energies that constitutes the difference between man and man. It is this that gives

us the idea of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

MAHAVIR—This is socialism. Aren't you mixing up things ?
I thought religion was something different.

VALMIKI—Religion and Ethics are closely allied, like Goodness and God ; and all schemes of social and political welfare have goodness for their end. Goodness and God may even be identified ; and it is Vedanta that understands the true character of God and the Soul, and so of goodness too.

MAHAVIR—Does this imply that Vedanta alone is true, and all the other systems false ? Or has Vedanta its own limitations too ?

VALMIKI—All these systems are an attempt to examine the whole problem of life from a particular point of view ; and it is for this reason that they are called Darsanas or visions of life. Each has its own contribution to make. Vedanta examines the question in the light of the Soul ; and, in connection with the idea of God, it is the opposite of Sankhya, as Yoga is of Nyaya ; while the Vaisesika lies between them. But, like the rest, Vedanta has its own limitations too.

MAHAVIR—Indeed !

VALMIKI—Yes ; but to understand this, we must examine the whole question in the light of the idea of Sacrifice.

MAHAVIR—All this is so strange ! But you have explained only five systems so far. I thought they were six.

VALMIKI—I am coming to that. The sixth is called *Purva Mimansa*, and deals with the problem of Sacrifice. It is said to be an introduction to all Hindu Philosophy. Unless we understand what Sacrifice means and the place it occupies in our life, we cannot grasp the essential idea of any system of thought.

MAHAVIR—Yes, indeed. Sacrifice is creative, deliberate and disinterested action, meant for the benefit of all, including the doer himself, but no more than the rest ; and it is this that enables us to understand the idea of God. All human actions partake of this character, in more or less degree ; but the more we act in a spirit of Sacrifice, the nearer are we to perfection, that is God. And when we associate this idea with the great forces of Nature, and believe that they are creative, that there is a design and purpose and will behind them, that they are universal and so disinterested in their operation, and act for the benefit of all, that through apparent destruction and death they recreate newer and more beautiful forms of life—we transform Nature itself into God. That is what I learnt when I was converted to belief in God.

VALMIKI—You have understood the idea of Sacrifice and its relation to Nature and God. Now if we believe in Nature and deny God, we regard life as an evil, and reject all action, even as a Sacrifice ; and the sooner our life comes to an end, the better, we think, would it be for all. This is the conclusion to which the *Sankhya* leads. But, as we wish to live, we must believe in God, good actions or Sacrifice, and so we pass on to the next system, *Nyaya*.

MAHAVIR—I have understood this too. As we believe in happiness, and Nature cannot provide it, we must believe in a happy Being who lives beyond Nature ; and that is God outside the universe. Then, as acts of Sacrifice, performed in this world, are free from the fetters that bind, and make for happiness all round, that Being all whose actions are an unending Sacrifice, is God within the universe. I understood this too when I came to believe in God.

VALMIKI—You have understood. Now, as Nyaya has a small place for God, it has a correspondingly small place for Sacrifice, and believes that the end of life is renunciation of action. The next system, Vaiseshika, believes in Nature and God as equal or almost equal creators of life ; and so it believes in Sacrifice and renunciation almost alike. Yoga, the next system, believes that God is the chief creator, and Nature almost like a spectator of his work ; and so it holds that acts of Sacrifice should always be performed. But, as it gives a place, however small, to Nature too, it cannot eliminate renunciation altogether; and believes that, while we cannot renounce good and necessary actions, we must renounce their fruit instead.

MAHAVIR—This is the exact teaching of the Bhagavad Gita.

VALMIKI—Yes ; it is a treatise on the Yoga system of thought, and examines the problems of life in its light.

MAHAVIR—This is amazing. How strangely do things fit into one another ! Yes, this is Yoga. Now what is the idea of Vedanta ?

VALMIKI—Vedanta, holding that it is God alone who creates, believes that all actions, of whatever kind, are a perpetual Sacrifice, and so it has no place for renunciation at all. And it is for this reason that Purva Mimansa, which deals with the problem of Sacrifice and so is connected with all these systems, is specially associated with, and culminates in, Vedanta.

MAHAVIR—Surely all human actions are not good, and cannot be said to be a Sacrifice. You do not deny the existence of evil, do you? We all act to secure some pleasure or good, and to escape its opposite, evil or pain. That is the teaching of all systems of philosophy, as I have read them; and it is this that enables us to understand the idea of God or Sacrifice. You cannot eliminate evil from the world, can you?

VALMIKI—Yes; but if there is God and God alone, there is nothing but life and good and happiness; there can be no sorrow or evil or death. They are all transformed into but different aspects of life and good and joy for ever renewed in the world; and evil, sorrow and death appear to be but an illusion to those who believe in this idea of God. But human beings, such as they are, feel their presence as real things; they are not imaginary or an illusion to them: and that is the limitation of Vedanta. As, if we believe in Nature alone, all life becomes evil and we must cease to be;—and in order to live we must believe in goodness and God;—even so, if we believe in God alone, everything is good, there is nothing to renounce and we cannot die. But, as death is the lot of all, we cannot believe in God and God alone, and have to believe in Nature too. And so we descend

to the next lower system, that is Yoga, which gives a small place to Nature, and enables us to understand the problems of life, such as they are in this world, at their best. At the extreme ends of thought lie Sankhya and Vedanta—the pure monism of Nature and the pure monism of God; and both of them are impossible of application to the actual conditions of life, as we find them in the world. Between them lie Nyaya, Vaiseshika, and Yoga, which admit the existence of both Nature and God in varying degrees ; and it is possible for man to follow any one of them. But if Sacrifice be the basis of life, the first place belongs to Yoga, then comes Vaiseshika, then Nyaya.

MAHAVIR—This is wonderful. But is not life really eternal ? and so, is not Vedanta the only ultimate truth ?

VALMIKI—How you shift your ground ! It is the ultimate truth, but not in this world where we live. This earth is only a small part of the great scheme of things, and life is eternal in its totality— not here. This is the world of the manifest, where those who are born must die, and those who die are born again.

MAHAVIR—The Gita says so too. How strangely do all things fit into one another. The different systems of philosophy and religion appear to be so conflicting, so contradictory ; but you have reconciled them in a most extraordinary way. Is all this contained in the systems themselves ?

VALMIKI—This is the idea of the systems themselves. I have only tried to understand and interpret them : that is my

humble task. They are called Darsanas, that is, visions of truth or points of view ; and each is a vision or a point of view, as I have explained. They are derived from the Upanishads, and the Upanishads are an exposition of the inner meaning of the Vedas; while the Epics, which are said to be Vedas too, are an account of the same in story-form. If we can explain the Epics in terms of systems of philosophy, we can check them up both backward and forward ; and unless they can be fitted into this frame-work, we may not accept them as accounts of these systems.

MAHAVIR—This is more wonderful than I had imagined. But what is the connection between the Vedas and these systems ? They all claim to be based on the Vedas ; but how, no one seems to know.

VALMIKI—You must go to Visvamitra for a detailed explanation : I can only give you a bare outline of the whole. The Vedas consist of hymns addressed to a number of gods, the idea of many of whom is explained in the Vedas themselves, but more fully and clearly in the Upanishads. For instance, Vishnu is the supreme deity of the Soul, and Yayu is air or vital breath, the vehicle of the Soul in man. Hence Vedanta, based on the character of the Soul, is derived from a description of these gods. Similarly Agni and Indra are identified with the Sun, which personifies Buddhi or intelligence in the sacred books ; and so Yoga, based on the character of Buddhi, is derived from a description of these gods. Indra also refers to the self-conscious Soul in the Upanishads ; and from this we may conclude that Buddhi is, for practical purposes, identified with the Soul in the system based on him ; and that should be the point of view of Arjuna, the son of Indra, in the

Mahabharata. Similarly Soma and Rudra are identified in the sacred books with the Mind, the basis of the Vaiseshika. In the same way Dyava-Prithvi and the two Asvins refer to the twin-born senses of knowledge and action, and so constitute the basis of Nyaya. Similarly Sankhya, based on the idea of Nature or Prakriti as the supreme creator of life, is derived from a description of Varuna and Vritra in the Vedas.

MAHAVIR—This is something new to me. Can this too be checked up with reference to the Upanishads and the Epics ?

VALMIKI—Yes ; otherwise the explanation of the Epics must fail. Let us revert to the idea of Sacrifice, which enables us to understand the idea of God, and to rise from one system to another. If we associate it with Food, the basis of the Sankhya—that is, if we believe that food is creative in its character, and we must eat intelligently, unselfishly, and not only for our own good but for the good of others too, we cannot remain confined to the Sankhya, and so pass on to the next system, Nyaya. Similarly, if we associate Sacrifice with the senses, the basis of Nyaya—that is, believe that the senses function creatively, intelligently, unselfishly and for the good of life, we grasp the idea of the Mind, and so pass on to the next higher system, Vaiseshika. In the same manner the idea of the Sacrifice of the Mind enables us to grasp the idea of Buddhi, the basis of Yoga ; and the Sacrifice of Buddhi takes us to the idea of the Soul, the basis of Vedanta.

MAHAVIR—This is most interesting. But didn't you say that the different systems of Philosophy were connected with those of Religion ? How is that ?

VALMIKI—As I explained to you, each of the three great systems of Religion—of Brahma, Mahadeva and Vishnu—has three aspects, and they are based on the character of the different systems of Philosophy. The three aspects of the system of Brahma correspond to Sankhya, Nyaya, and Vaiseshika respectively ; the three aspects of the system of Mahadeva to Nyaya, Vaiseshika, and Yoga ; and the three forms of the system of Vishnu to Vaiseshika, Yoga, and Vedanta respectively. This will explain to you the connection between them. At the two ends stand Sankhya and Vedanta---apart and by themselves ; but all the other systems have something in common between them—but not without a shade of difference in each. For instance, Nyaya, as connected with the system of Brahma, holds that God is but a spectator of Nature's work ; but, in connection with the system of Mahadeva, it holds that he is a minor actor and not a mere spectator of Prakriti. Similarly, Vaiseshika, as connected with the system of Brahma, holds that God is a minor and Nature a major creator of life ; in connection with the system of Mahadeva it believes that the two are equal ; while in connection with the system of Vishnu it gives a major place to God and a minor one to Nature or Prakriti. In the same way Yoga, the opposite of Nyaya, conceives of God as the chief and Nature as a minor creator in the system of Mahadeva ; while in the system of Vishnu it believes that Nature is but a spectator of the work of God, who alone creates.

MAHAVIR—This is a most amazing way of fitting all the systems of Philosophy and Religion into one great whole.

VALMIKI—The proof of the mango is in the eating of it.

MAHAVIR—What is the mango in this case ?

VALMIKI—The explanation of the great Epics and the Puranas as accounts of these systems in story-form.

MAHAVIR—Can you explain them all in this way ?

VALMIKI—I can explain the Ramayana to you. But they can all be explained in this way, and there are others who can do it.

MAHAVIR—This is wonderful. And so you can explain all the characters and events in the Ramayana, human as well as divine, as representing ideas of philosophy and religion ?—the friends and foes, their alliances and combats, but as ideas in association or opposition—as accounts of their agreements and conflicts ?

VALMIKI—Yes, all.

MAHAVIR—May I then ask who is Rama ? He is only half an avatar or incarnation of Vishnu : what is an avatar, and why only a half ?

VALMIKI—An avatar or incarnation is one who embodies the idea of God made manifest in this world through Sacrifice. When men deny God and Sacrifice, when evil triumphs and unrighteousness prevails, he comes to re-establish righteousness and good in the world. Rama, Krishna and others are such avatars or incarnations of God. Now the system of Vishnu has three forms—pure monism, qualified monism, and dualism. The first, based on pure Vedanta,

can have no incarnation, for Vedanta is impossible of realisation in our world. But the second, based on Yoga, gives us as perfect an idea of God as we can understand; and this is represented by Krishna, the complete incarnation of Vishnu.

MAHAVIR—Is that the reason why Krishna is spoken of as the Lord of Yoga in the Gita ?

VALMIKI—Yes. The Mahabharata itself culminates in this system, and the Bhagavad Gita, as a part of the Epic, is a treatise on it too. Let us revert to Rama. The third or the dualistic system of Vishnu, based on the Vaiseshika, holds that God and Nature are joint creators of the universe, but the share of God is greater than that of Nature. This is represented by Rama ; and so he is but half an incarnation of Vishnu.

MAHAVIR—This is wonderful. And so Krishna retains the character of God in accordance with the qualified monistic, and Rama in accordance with the dualistic, system of Vishnu throughout ? and you can explain the whole of the Ramayana in this way ?

VALMIKI—Yes.

MAHAVIR—I am dying to know this. Pray go on, and tell me who is Ravana.

VALMIKI—You have grasped the character of the three great systems—of Vishnu, Mahadeva and Brahma; and understand how the system of Vishnu may, in certain circumstances, be regarded as opposed to that of Brahma ; don't you ?

MAHAVIR—Yes. They are really not opposed ; but if a person regards the system of Brahma to be the only truth, exclusive of the rest, he would then be deemed to be hostile to the system of Vishnu ; not otherwise.

VALMIKI—Now Rama, as half an incarnation of Vishnu, represents his dualistic school ; while Ravana, as a descendant of Brahma, represents his system, and conceives of it as the only truth. Hence the hostility between them.

MAHAVIR—But why is Ravana made to look like a monster with ten heads ?

VALMIKI—This is an ancient way of giving form to an idea. The ten heads refer to the ten senses of knowledge and action, with which the Mind is always associated, as you know. This is Ravana with ten heads, representing the Mind and the ten senses—which constitute the basis of Nyaya and the Vaiseshika in the system of Brahma.

MAHAVIR This is confusing. Didn't you say that Rama too represents the Mind, the basis of the Vaiseshika ?

VALMIKI—Yes, but there is a vital difference between these two aspects of the Vaiseshika. In the system of Brahma it holds that God and Nature are joint creators of life but the major place belongs to Nature, not God ; while in the system of Vishnu it holds the very opposite view. And so Rama gives a higher place to God and Sacrifice, while Ravana to Nature and renunciation of action.

MAHAVIR—What are Rakshasas then ? and why is Ravana said to be the king of these dark spirits of the night, the perpetrators of all evil in the world ?

VALMIKI—The Rakshasas are those who believe in Nature and not God as the chief creator of the universe ; and so they hold that all life is an evil, and all actions, even those performed as a Sacrifice, must be renounced. It is for this reason that they are said to block or frustrate all Sacrifice or good actions. They are anti-social, and so described as monsters ; and Ravana is their chief, because he personifies in himself all that is associated with the idea of Nature as the supreme creator of the universe.

MAHAVIR—This is an extraordinary way of representing things.

VALMIKI—The sacred literature of the Hindus has a peculiar symbolism of its own. It represents God and Nature in different forms. God is man and Nature woman; God is light and day, and Nature darkness and night; and so on; and many other ideas are represented in this manner. And so the Rakshasas, who believe in Nature, are the children of darkness, and range in the region of the night.

MAHAVIR—Are all the Rakshasas like that ?

VALMIKI—Not all are evil. Those who, like Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana, believe that the system of Brahma is a stepping stone to those of Mahadeva and Vishnu, are good, and follow the path of truth even in their own faith; and so they are said to have a Dharma of their own.

MAHAVIR—Vibhishana ! I thought he was the first traitor in history, and had tainted its pages throughout. There is not a period of Indian history but has its Vibhishana. He deserted his king and country, joined the enemy, and

divulged to them the secrets of Lanka's defences. Ravana is great. He rose in my estimation for allowing his brother to go.

VALMIKI—You will have to change your opinion before long. This is not a war in the vulgar sense of the term. It is a great battle of conflicting ideas—a great debate. There can be no argument unless those who believe in an idea adhere to their own point of view. How can Vibhishana side with his brother when he believes that the system of Brahma is a stepping stone to those of Mahadeva and Vishnu, and Rama represents a more correct point of view? Even so in the battle of Kurukshetra in the Mahabharata, some of the princes of the Kurus join the Pandava hosts. As for divulging secrets, Rama returns the compliment too. He allows the spies of Ravana to survey his own forces and carry away whatever information they please. In a debate, when truth is your object, where is the harm in telling your opponent what point of view you hold? He may then agree with or oppose you at will.

MAHAVIR—Indeed! and so this is not a war, but a great debate! Then why all these hosts, with their chariots and elephants, horse and foot, arrayed in deadly combat? The Mahabharata tells us of millions of men assembled in the field, with arms of wonderful kind. The Ramayana too has its hosts of monkeys and demons; and so many are wounded and slain.

VALMIKI—Yes: all these can be resolved into points of argument in a debate. When a person is "wounded", it means that the argument has gone home; and when he is "slain", it means that he admits his error and owns

defeat, and agrees that he is a believer in Nature and not God. All this can easily be explained by means of the ancient method of interpretation I told you of.

MAHAVIR—Strange, most strange ! Now I remember. There were great councils called by the kings of old to discuss the principles of Buddhism and Hinduism. Is this war between Ravana and Rama a debate of the same kind ?

VALMIKI—Similar, but on a vaster scale. Nor must you confine it in point of time to the great religious councils of which you have read in your books of history. You have read of the great war of the Pranas or Senses in the Upanishads ; and the war of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata is of the same kind. It is eternal, and goes on for ever ; it is there even now—the conflict between action and idleness, selfishness and sacrifice. Nor is there any contradiction between actual war, as you are accustomed to imagine it, and a war of ideas. Look at the great war that is raging all over the world to-day. Behind the actions of men are their interests ; but behind their interests are ideas. More than the conflict of men and nations, it is their ideologies that are at war. And so a great debate is of the nature of war ; and in the one as in the other only those can succeed who believe in and make the largest sacrifice.

MAHAVIR—Wonderful, most wonderful. Sacrifice in war as in a debate ! But the one makes for death, and the other for life and belief in God.

VALMIKI—Death in war is the beginning of a larger life. Sacrifice is not a process of suffering and pain ; these are

but the throes of a newer birth, a newer life of happiness and joy. And that is true of both—a bloody war and a great debate.

MAHAVIR—I do not know what to think. How strangely do the actual and the ideal coincide ! Do you really deny that there were great wars of which the Ramayana and the Mahabharata speak ?

VALMIKI—No. There may have been great wars. History is full of them ; and may be, great wars actually took place ; and it is with such a background that the epics of Ramayana and the Mahabharata were composed. But, as they are, they are not accounts of battles of blood, but of ideas and arguments in the language of war.

MAHAVIR—This is amazing. I am so confused. You have told me something about Ravana and Vibhishana. Who is Kumbha-karna then ?

VALMIKI—Ravana represents the Nyaya and Vaisheshika systems in the religion of Brahma ; but this school is based on the Sankhya too. Ravana cannot represent it, for the Sankhya stands by itself and combines with nothing else ; and yet it is closely allied to his own point of view. And it is the Sankhya that his brother Kumbha-karna represents. The Sankhya is based on the creative character of the vital energy of Food ; and the word Karna means grain or seed of corn that can be sown and multiplied.

MAHAVIR—Is that the idea of Kumbha-karna because of the meaning of Karna that forms part of his name ? Is there not a Karna in the Mahabharata too ? Does he also represent the same ?

VALMIKI—Yes. The same name must have the same significance in all sacred literature—at least in works that are allied. It is only then that these books can be regarded as stories of Philosophy and Religion.

MAHAVIR—This is wonderful. What is Kumbha then? Has it any connection with the Karna of the Mahabharata too?

VALMIKI—Yes. Kum-bha means literally “born or made manifest in the earth”; and that is Karna or Grain of the Ramayana. In the Mahabharata Karna is the son of Kum-ti, and the word “Kum” means “the earth” in Sanskrit; while “ti” is an older form of “iti” which means “that is to say”. Thus the Karna of the Mahabharata is also “born of the earth” like Kumbha-karna of the Ramayana. You see that the syllable “kum” is common to both.

UMA—This takes my breath away. So Kunti is not a woman, but the mother Earth, and Karna or Grain is her first born child! How I was shocked when I read in the story that the Sun approached Kunti, and Karna was born; and then she, without compunction, threw the naked child into water, and it was picked up by some one!

VALMIKI—It is when the Sun shines on the earth that grain or seed is born; but in order to grow and multiply, it must be placed in water. This is the law of the vegetable kingdom; that is what the Upanishads say; and that is what the Mahabharata repeats in the story of Kunti and Karna.

UMA—Strange, most strange. And can the other incidents, which shocked me so, be explained in the same way too?

VALMIKI—Yes. They are all but accounts of similar ideas, based on the facts of life and the teachings of the sacred books. But you must go to Vyasa for a detailed explanation of the Mahabharata. Ask anything you wish to know about the Ramayana now.

MAHAVIR—What about the long months of Kumbha-karna's sleep? He takes enormous quantities of food and drink when he wakes. What has that to do with his character as grain?

VALMIKI—That is the period of hibernation for all seed or grain. It must, on an average, rest for a period ranging from six to ten months before it can germinate again. That is why Kumbha-karna sleeps so long, and cannot be awakened before his time. And then, when the time comes for the seed to germinate, what must it have to grow? It is water and manure—and the bones and ashes of animals, the sap or pulp of plants, and worms constitute the best forms of manure—that will enable it to grow. In addition to this it needs air as well. This, when properly interpreted, is the real meaning of the text, which you have understood as the herds of buffaloes and deer that Kumbha-karna eats when he wakes.

MAHAVIR—I am so bewildered. Manure and water and air for seed to germinate! This sounds so modern. Did the ancients know too much of science too?

VALMIKI—I leave it to you to imagine. This is the real meaning of the text.

MAHAVIR—I do not know what to think. If this is Kumbha-karna, who is Indrajit, the son of Ravana?

VALMIKI—Indra, as I have told you, is connected with the word *Indriya* or the senses; and “jit” means “a conqueror”. Indra-jit is one who has conquered or subdued his senses; and the control or conquest of the senses is of the essence of the idea of the Sacrifice of the senses, leading to the idea of the Mind, which Ravana represents; and so *Indrajit* is the “son” of Ravana.

MAHAVIR—This is not quite clear to me.

VALMIKI—Ravana represents the system of *Brahma*, which believes in a limited form of Sacrifice—the Sacrifice of the senses—and it is this that is represented by *Indra-jit*, as the son of Ravana. Now you will understand why there were *Brahmanas* in the court of Ravana, who performed sacrifices and prayed for his success.

MAHAVIR—You have an extraordinary way of explaining things. Let me go back to Rama. If he represents the Mind or the dualistic school of *Vishnu*, what about his brothers, *Lakshmana*, *Satrughna* and *Bharata*? Who is *Dasaratha*, his father and king, and who are his three queens?

VALMIKI—The brothers of Rama are also spoken of as incarnations of *Vishnu*, but on a smaller scale; that is to say, they embody the idea of *Vishnu* to a certain extent. But let me begin with *Dasaratha*. Rama is said to be an incarnation or embodiment of the idea of God: Now tell me what is the necessity of this incarnation?

MAHAVIR—To re-establish righteousness and truth in the world when they decay.

VALMIKI—It follows then that *Dasaratha* had not understood aright the correct idea of God; for had he done so, as

he was a king, he could have established the truth himself, and there would have been no need for Rama to be born.

MAHAVIR—This sounds logical, I suppose.

VALMIKI—If you understand the idea of Dasaratha, you will find that he represents the system of Brahma, but only as a stepping stone to those of Mahadeva and Vishnu. And so, while he cannot re-establish righteousness and truth himself, he can help ; and Rama or the dualistic school of Vishnu is born in the ground prepared by him.

MAHAVIR—This is interesting. What about his three queens ?

VALMIKI—The system of Brahma has three divisions—based on the character of the three corresponding systems of thought—Vaiseshika, Nyaya, and Sankhya—in each of which Nature or Prakriti has an important part to play. Now Prakriti is represented as a Woman in the sacred books ; and so Dasaratha has three wives to represent the three forms of Nature or Prakriti in his system. Of these Kausalya is the Prakriti of the Vaiseshika, Sumitra of Nyaya, and Kaikeyi of the Sankhya.

MAHAVIR—This is wonderful. And what about their sons ?

VALMIKI—Each of them creates after her kind. Rama, the son of Kausalya, is Mind, the basis of the Vaiseshika ; the twins, Lakshmana and Satrugna, the sons of Sumitra, are the twin-born senses of knowledge and action, the basis of Nyaya ; while Bharata, the son of Kaikeyi, represents the sum total of the forces of life in Nature that go to make the Sankhya.

MAHAVIR—This is marvellous. May I ask why Rama and Lakshmana were always on one side, and Bharata and Satrughna on the other ?

VALMIKI—The twins, Lakshmana and Satrughna, represent the twin-born senses ; but we may conceive of their functions in different ways. Some of them may be said to act in conjunction with the Mind, while others in conjunction with their objects—all of which are to be found in Nature. Accordingly Lakshmana, who represents the former, is associated with Rama or the Mind ; while Satrughna, who refers to the latter, is a companion of Bharata or the objects of which Nature consists.

MAHAVIR—How strangely do all things appear to fit in ! Do the same characters occur in the Mahabharata too ?

VALMIKI—Yes,—in a different way, of course—as that Epic follows its own line of thought. The idea of the three forms of Prakriti in the system of Brahma is represented in the Mahabharata by the three sisters—Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika.

UMA—Then the Niyoga of Vyasa is only an account of ideas of Philosophy ? I thought it was a most shocking thing.

VALMIKI—Yes ; it explains how we can descend from Yoga, to lower systems of thought. But you must go to my brother for an account of this.

MAHAVIR—What then is the difference between Dasaratha and Ravana, if both of them represent the system of Brahma ? The king of Lanka is also called Dasa-griva ; and the syllable Dasa seems to be common to both.

VALMIKI—Dasaratha and Dasagriva both represent the same system of thought—that is, the system of **Brahma**—but from opposite points of view. The former holds that it is a stepping stone to those of Mahadeva and Vishnu ; while the latter maintains that it is the ultimate truth.

MAHAVIR—And so the Ramayana is an account of the opposition between these two aspects of the system of **Brahma** ?

VALMIKI—No. It is an account of the opposition between the system of **Brahma**, conceived to be an end in itself—as represented by Ravana—on the one hand, and the dualistic school of Vishnu, as represented by Rama, on the other. It would be difficult, hardly dramatic, to represent an opposition between two aspects of the same thing, without bringing in a third ; and that is the system of Vishnu.

MAHAVIR—Did you not say that the system of **Brahma** is divided into Buddhism and Jainism ? Am I to understand that the Ramayana is a story of the conflict between these systems on the one hand, and the dualistic school of Vishnu on the other ?

VALMIKI—Yes, Buddhism and Jainism, conceived as exclusive and an end in themselves, on the one hand, and the dualistic school of Vishnu on the other.

MAHAVIR—And the Mahabharata ?

VALMIKI—A story of the conflict between Buddhism and Jainism, conceived in the same light—as represented by the Kauravas—on the one hand ; and the qualified monistic school—as represented by Krishna and the Pandavas—on the other.

MAHAVIR—This seems to put the two Epics in a historical setting. We read of the conflict between Hinduism and Buddhism in early Indian history ; and Buddhism is said to have been defeated and driven out of India in the end. Are the Epics an account of this ?

VALMIKI—An account of this conflict, but not limited to a particular time or place in the way you have read. What they relate is something fundamental—a conflict between belief in the great forces of Nature on the one hand, and belief in God on the other ; and the story of this strife is eternal. And if certain events actually take place in the history of a people or race, it only shows how, by the great Law of Life, the actual and the ideal coincide. It does not mean that the Epics are but a record of certain happenings in the way you mean.

MAHAVIR—Pardon me. I feel so lost. Let me go back to the Ramayana. Now tell me who is Sita ? Is she a real woman, or does she also represent an idea or a system of thought ?

VALMIKI—Sita is not a woman in the ordinary sense of the term, as it is commonly understood. She represents Sacrifice, out of which she is said to have been born. You will remember that her father Janaka prepared the earth for a Sacrifice, and it was out of this that Sita arose. A Woman, in the sacred books, is described to be an instrument of creation ; and so Sita is real or creative Sacrifice, inseparable from the idea of God. Accordingly Rama, the true incarnation of God, alone can win and wed her.

UMA—This is wonderful. Was not Draupadi also born out of a Sacrifice ? Is her idea too the same ?

VALMIKI—Yes ; and so she is called Yajna-seni or “ Mistress of Sacrifice ”; and as Sacrifice leads to the idea of God, she is called Krishnā too, which means literally “ leading to Krishna ”, who is the most perfect embodiment of the idea of God, made manifest through Sacrifice.

UMA—How wonderful ! So Draupadi is not a woman, but Sacrifice ! She is said to have been married to five husbands—the five Pandava brothers : what does this signify ?

VALMIKI—The five Pandava brothers are but five parts of one man ; and so Draupadi or Sacrifice is united with Man, who becomes thereby a man of God. It is for this reason that Krishna or God appears for the first time in the Epic on the occasion of the wedding.

UMA—What do you mean by five parts of one man ? I do not understand this.

VALMIKI—The body of a man may be divided into two sections, one extending from the crown of the head to the organ of excretion, and the other consisting of arms and legs. A man can continue to live even if he loses his legs and arms. As these two sections are so distinct, they may be described as born of different mothers ; and these are Kunti and Madri, the two mothers of the Pandavas.

UMA—Indeed ! I thought you said that Kunti was Earth—the mother of Karna or Grain ?

VALMIKI—The Earth is the mother not only of the vegetable kingdom or Karna, but also of the animal kingdom, repre-

sented at its best in Man. And so Madri is able to create only at the instance of Kunti: that is what you find in the Epic. Kunti or Earth is the mother of Karna or Grain, as well as of the Pandava brothers or Man.

UMA—This is so confusing. But let me understand the idea of the five Pandava brothers. How do they represent five parts of one man?

VALMIKI—The first section of man, from the crown of the head to the organ of excretion, may be divided into three parts: Buddhi, centred in the upper half of the head; Mind, centred in the lower one; and Pranas or the senses of knowledge and action, through which moves the vital breath or Prana, making them active and alive. I told you that the senses are called Pranas in the Upanishads, and for this reason. Yudhishtira, the eldest, is Buddhi; Bhima is Mind; while Arjuna is Prana or the vital breath moving through the senses; and it is only when he realises his character as Soul, seated in the vital breath, that he attains to perfection. This is the same as the idea of Indra, as I explained to you. Hence Arjuna is spoken of as the "son" of that god.

UMA—This is marvellous. What about Nakula and Sahadeva?

VALMIKI—They represent the Arms and Legs of a man. You see how they are like real twins!

UMA—Is this the story of the Mahabharata?

VALMIKI—Yes; an account of the evolution of the five Pandava brothers or Man, functioning with all his organs and

energies; rising from the lowest to the highest conception of Life; and attaining, through Draupadi or Sacrifice, to the closest union with Krishna or the most perfect embodiment of the idea of God.

UMA—Wonderful, most wonderful ! The idea of Draupadi still puzzles me. She was born out of the sacrificial fire of her father, as I have read. But she had a brother and a sister too ; and they also arose out of the same. What do they signify ?

VALMIKI—They represent different ideas associated with Sacrifice, to make it complete. Draupadi herself is Sacrifice leading to the idea of God. Now we must understand the basis of this Sacrifice : and that is the Sacrifice of the senses and the Mind. In other words, we must perform good, intelligent and selfless actions with our senses, and think in the same way, to be able to understand the idea of Sacrifice. This is the Sacrifice of the senses and the Mind, which enables us to understand the idea of Buddhi, the basis of the Yoga system of thought, in which the Mahabharata culminates. This is Dhrishta-dyumna, the brother of Draupadi.

UMA—Was he not the leader of the Pandavas in the battle of Kurukshetra ?

VALMIKI—Yes ; and that will tell you how we can establish the idea of God through Sacrifice. But you must go to my brother Vyasa for this. Now let us go on to the sister of Draupadi. She represents the third idea associated with Sacrifice, namely, that Nature or Prakriti itself is transformed into God by means of Sacrifice. Accordingly, when

this girl grew into a woman, she was transformed into a man through Sacrifice.

UMA—This is most marvellous. Was she not the cause of the death of the great Grandsire Bhishma?

VALMIKI—Bhishma represents belief in the system of *Brahma*; and he can be convinced or "slain" only when it can be shown that Nature itself is transformed into God by means of Sacrifice.

UMA—This is wonderful, most wonderful! What then is the idea of the unrobing of Draupadi? How much would I give to know what this really means!

VALMIKI—Well, I must tell you. You remember the story of the Gambling Match between Sakuni and Yudhishtira. Sakuni plays with deceit, and the Pandava loses all. Draupadi is out of the picture while the game goes on; but after Yudhishtira has lost his all, she is dragged in; and then Karna tries to take off her robes.

UMA—Yes, I remember.

VALMIKI—This is really a debate between the *Sankhya* system, with its denial of God and Sacrifice—as represented by Sakuni and Karna, on the one hand—and belief in God and Sacrifice, as represented by Yudhishtira, on the other. For the moment the former succeeds; for the Pandavas do not possess knowledge enough at the time to enable them to hold their own. It is an unequal debate—a Gamble of thought; and the Pandavas are compelled to agree with those who believe in Nature and deny God, that even acts of Sacrifice must be renounced, if man wishes to be

saved. And so Yudhishtira stakes and loses Draupadi or Sacrifice.

UMA—But why did Karna behave so disgracefully, and why did all the sages and elders assembled in the Hall look on as silent spectators of the scene ?

VALMIKI—As this is a public debate, it takes place in the presence of the learned men of the times. Karna is Grain, and represents the vital energy born of Food, which constitutes the basis of the Sankhya. If this system succeeds, we must, like the Digambara school, renounce all action, however necessary, including the wearing of clothes. The Pandavas agree, and take off their own clothes themselves. But is this the character of true Sacrifice ? Can we really renounce necessary actions, and live ? Draupadi protests, and maintains that without Sacrifice or necessary actions life itself must end ; and that by the very definition of the idea she represents, she is creative action, necessary action, action indispensable to life, action that leads to the idea of God. But Karna persists in his own way of thought and attempts to unrobe her. But it is soon realised by those who understand the idea of Sacrifice, that what Draupadi maintains is true ; and so she cannot be unrobed ; and it is Krishna or the idea of God with which she is associated, that comes to her assistance. It would take long to explain the details ; but this is idea in brief.

UMA—Who could have imagined it ! This is more wonderful than I can think. Is the idea of Krishna taking away the clothes of the Gopis of the same kind too ? I have troubled you so much. Let me know this if I may.

VALMIKI—The Gopis were bathing naked in water ; they had taken off their clothes of their own accord : that is, denied God, as I have explained. So long, therefore, as they continue to do so, they must remain without clothes ; and they can get them back only when they return to belief in God. This is the idea of the story in the *Bhagavat Purana*.

UMA—This is wonderful, most wonderful. How strangely have we misunderstood these things !

MAHAVIR—Who could have thought of this ! Now tell me something more about the Ramayana. Why did *Kaikeyi* oppose the coronation of Rama and insist on his exile ?

VALMIKI—*Kaikeyi* is *Prakriti* of the *Sankhya* ; but, as the wife of *Dasaratha*, she believes that this system is a stepping stone to others, culminating in the *Vaiseshika* as the upper limit of the system of *Brahma*, to which the king belongs. She is however, prepared to agree that the system of *Brahma* leads to those of *Mahadeva* and *Vishnu* ; and so welcomes at first the coronation of Rama, or the establishment of the dualistic school of *Vishnu*. But will not that lead ultimately to the elimination of the *Sankhya* itself, which she and her son *Bharata* represent ? She is led to believe that it will ; for the system of *Vishnu* culminates in pure *Vedanta*, which utterly excludes the *Sankhya*, and has no place for Nature or *Prakriti* as a separate entity. This she is unable to accept, and so demands a proof of what Rama and his system stand for and imply. No one can satisfy her at that stage, and so Rama must go out into the world of life to seek for the proof of what he represents. He cannot appeal to his idea of Sacrifice, for that would be begging

the whole question ; and so Rama and Sita and Lakshmana all go into the forest or the world of Nature in quest of their proof.

MAHAVIR—This is fascinating. But what is wrong about this ? Is it not sensible to demand proof in so important a matter as this ? But why did Kaikeyi require that her own son be placed on the throne ? and what was her deceit of which Dasaratha complains ?

VALMIKI—There is nothing wrong about demanding proof ; and that is why Rama, who was unable to satisfy her at the time, so readily agreed to do what she desired. Further, to know the whole truth, we must demand proof of a thing in its entirety. Let, therefore, the pure Sankhya be established as the one system in the world for the time being ; and let us see what happens, and understand how the dualistic school of Vishnu can legitimately take its place. That is the demand of Kaikeyi ; and so she asks that her son Bharata be placed on the throne, and Rama be exiled.

MAHAVIR—I do not see any deceit in this.

VALMIKI—No. But, if you accept the Sankhya, what follows ?

MAHAVIR—The negation of action, and all that it implies.

VALMIKI—Yes ; and it is this that is stated in the text—the negation of action ; and it is this that has been misunderstood as “deceit”. The Sanskrit word used in the text is *Nikriti*—*Ni-kri-ti*—which literally means “the negation of action.”

MAHAVIR—How extraordinary ! In the Mahabharata Sakuni too is said to have played with deceit. You said that he also represents the Sankhya. Is the same word for deceit used there too ?

VALMIKI—Yes ; and there also the meaning is exactly the same.

MAHAVIR—How amazing is all this ! And so when this “deceit” succeeds, it is followed in both cases by an exile ! Rama goes out for fourteen and the Pandavas for thirteen years. There is Sita in the one, and Draupadi in the other ; and both of them accompany their husbands. And at the end of their exile there is a great war !

VALMIKI—Yes, indeed. And that is because the idea in both cases is exactly the same.

MAHAVIR—Then why did Dasaratha die ? and why did Bharata decline to accept the throne ?

VALMIKI—If the Sankhya prevails—even for the time being—as it assorts with nothing else, there can be no room for any other system ; and so Dasaratha, who represents the Nyaya and Vaiseshika, must cease to be ; and he passes away. But if we follow the Sankhya, life itself must come to an end. We assume its existence only as a step in our quest of truth ; and we must pass on to a higher system before long, or else we perish. That is the place of the Sankhya in the scheme of life—as something subsidiary and subordinate to higher forms of thought. And so Bharata, who represents it and understands its true character, cannot consent to rule. He may do so only for the time being,—

but that too as subject to and in the name of something higher—and that is the system of Rama. The rule of the Sankhya, in its own name, means death ; and so it is always given a subordinate place in sacred literature. Accordingly Kumbha-karna, who represents it in the Ramayana, is subordinate to Ravana. Similarly in the Mahabharata, both Sakuni and Karna are subordinate to the Kauravas who rule.

MAHAVIR—This is indeed marvellous ! How strangely do the two Epics agree ! Now tell me who is Surpanakha ? and why did Rama and Lakshmana cut off her ears and nose ?

VALMIKI—Surpanakha is the sister of Ravana , and must, like her brother, represent the same system of thought, namely, the system of Brahma conceived as an end in itself. As the full range of this system extends from the Mind to the senses and their objects in Nature, she holds that the Mind is associated with the senses of knowledge and action indeed,—and that is the association of Rama and Lakshmana—but maintains that the latter are connected with their objects, which lie in Nature. Thus, according to her, all that the two brothers represent have their end in Nature, which she claims to have grasped. Accordingly, she believes that she is entitled to have both Rama and Lakshmana for herself ; and approaches them with that object when she sees them in the forest.

MAHAVIR—The situation has a peculiar humour of its own. But why did they cut off her ears and nose ?

VALMIKI—I have told you that “ wounding ”, “ killing ”, “ cutting off ” have all a special meaning of their own ;

and the Sanskrit words used in the text, when properly understood, signify it clearly enough. "Cutting off" means that it has been proved that the thing "cut off" belongs to Nature or the system of thought associated with it as the chief creator of life. Now Surpanakha claims to have grasped the true idea of the Mind and the senses, and so wants to have both Rama and Lakshmana for herself. But the correct idea of these is based on Sacrifice or Sita. Does she accept that too? As a believer in the system of Brahma, she cannot. She holds that acts of Sacrifice must ultimately be renounced, for they are all associated with their objects in Nature, and can have little to do with God; and so the salvation of man lies in meditation and knowledge. Hence she attacks and tries to "slay" Sita or Sacrifice in the very presence of the brothers. This proves that her idea of the senses and the Mind is purely physical, and that she has not understood their character aright. And so Lakshmana, who represents the correct idea of the senses and their connection with the Mind, "cuts off" her ears and nose—the first and last of the senses of knowledge—to show what she really signifies, and how erroneous is her belief.

MAHAVIR—This is truly amazing. It seems you can explain almost anything. But pray proceed. I am dying to know more.

VALMIKI—Now this is a challenge to the whole system of Brahma, as represented by Ravana; and so that monarch is roused to take action at last.

MAHAVIR—Why did he carry away Sita? Why did he not slay her as his sister had attempted to do?

VALMIKI—The whole thing, as you will see, turns on the idea of Sacrifice. Ravana, representing the system of Brahma, holds that he alone has grasped the true idea of Sacrifice ; namely, that it is action of some kind, and all action is related to some object, which again is ultimately rooted in Nature. Hence all Sacrifice, in its final analysis, refers to Nature and not God. He believes, however, that in order to live, for so long as we must, we should perform necessary actions or acts of Sacrifice ; but that is only for the time being, and the final goal of man is renunciation and the pursuit of knowledge. He believes, therefore, that he is entitled to possess Sita or Sacrifice ; and that if the idea she represents is different, he should try to convert it to his own. In other words, he maintains that Sacrifice is not essentially associated with the idea of God ; and so he contrives that Rama, who holds otherwise, should be separated from Sita or Sacrifice, and then carries the latter away.

MAHAVIR—This is most wonderful. Is that the reason why Ravana treats Sita so well ?

VALMIKI—Yes. He believes that it would be the greatest triumph of his life to convert the Sita-idea of Sacrifice to his own ; and so he begs Sita to forget Rama and become his foremost queen. But in case she refuses, he is prepared to “slay” her too ; for he believes that she represents an erroneous idea of Sacrifice. But Sita cannot give up Rama or God, nor can she be “slain” ; for it is of the essence of all true Sacrifice that no one can break its link with God, nor can it ever be destroyed.

MAHAVIR—This is wonderful, most wonderful. Then what about the Deer with the golden horns, which attracted both Sita and Rama, drew the latter to its pursuit, and helped Ravana to carry Sita away ?

VALMIKI—All Sacrifice is a form of action, and all action is born of some kind of desire. If this desire is selfish, foolish, or evil—the action cannot be a Sacrifice, and makes for sorrow and pain. But if the desire be unselfish, intelligent and good, it is a true Sacrifice, and makes for freedom and joy.

MAHAVIR—Yes, I understand.

VALMIKI—Now the Deer in ancient literature is a symbol of Desire, and that is the meaning of the Sanskrit word *Mriga* ; while Gold refers to *Buddhi* or intelligence. The Deer with the golden horns represents, therefore, Desire characterized by intelligence; and both Rama and Sita agree that such a desire is worthy of pursuit; and so Rama goes out after the deer. But the Deer was really an illusion—a *Rakshasa* in that form. In other words, the Desire it represented was only apparently intelligent and good, and in reality foolish and wicked. Men pursue such desires every day, and the best of them can be misled; and when this happens, there is a lapse, and they lose hold of Sacrifice and God. The same thing happens to Rama, and Sita is lost to him.

MAHAVIR—This is truly amazing. And so the best of men may lose hold of Sacrifice and God by pursuing illusory desires—apparently attractive and intelligent ! How then do we get back the idea of true Sacrifice and God ?

MAHAVIR—Then how does Rama succeed ?

VALMIKI—By proving that Nature is governed by a law which is fundamentally intelligent, selfless and good—the Law of Sacrifice. It is by this law that the sun shines and the rain falls, and all forms of life come into being, grow and multiply. Even if you believe that good and evil are mixed everywhere, the resultant must inevitably be good, for otherwise life itself must crumble and perish.

MAHAVIR—I think I understand. Is this the idea of the Gita when it says that rain falls by Sacrifice ? I had not thought of it before.

VALMIKI—Yes. And when man understands this law in the working of the great forces of Nature, he secures the means of regaining his lost hold of Sacrifice. It is this that is represented by the monkeys and bears—the allies of Rama, who help him to succeed.

MAHAVIR—Do we get the same idea in the Mahabharata too ?

VALMIKI—Yes ; but in a different form, of course. The Grandsire Bhishma is the generalissimo of the Kaurava hosts, and he must be defeated before the Pandavas can succeed. And he himself tells them how to secure their end. He cannot fight with a woman, or a person born as a woman but transformed into a man. In other words, the system of thought which he represents, namely Nyaya as the centre of the school of Brahma—can be defeated only when we are able to prove that Nature itself is transformed into God by means of Sacrifice ; for, as I have explained, Nature is represented as a woman, and God as a man in sacred literature.

MAHAVIR—This is indeed marvellous. When I read the story it seemed to me so fantastic and obscure. I could not understand how the Pandavas, with Krishna at their head, could go up to Bhishma and ask him to let them know the means of slaying him; and it seemed even more extraordinary that he should oblige them and tell them how exactly they could succeed. But you have put an entirely new construction on it now.

VALMIKI—In a great debate, when you wish to know the Truth, it is perfectly legitimate to ask an opponent to state the circumstances in which he would be prepared to give up his position or point of view; and this is what the Pandavas and Krishna do when they approach Bhishma in this connection. And Bhishma's answer is only in keeping with the spirit of the question itself.

MAHAVIR—I understand. But the whole thing is so extraordinary! Now tell me why did Rama slay Vali, the brother of the monkey-chief Sugriva, his great friend and ally—and that too without warning or cause? This has always disturbed me. I have called it murder sometimes; but I imagine this too has some symbolical significance, some idea to exemplify.

VALMIKI—Did you not say that the great forces of Nature do not always appear to make for what is good; and so perhaps the sum total of our desires may not be regarded as being in consonance with the law of Sacrifice? This doubt may occur even to those who are deemed to be believers in God. It is they who need to be convinced of their error before others; and this is the first hurdle to cross before you can fight those who openly avow their faith in Nature—that is the Rak-

shasas. And Vali, the brother of the monkey-chief Sugriva, the friend and ally of Rama, imagines that he believes in God, but holds that the forces of Nature and the desires associated with them are not always characterized by Sacrifice. It is the removal of this error that is described as the "slaughter of Vali" in the Ramayana.

MAHAVIR—Indeed ! When I read the text of the story, I was bewildered and baffled ; I almost lost my patience. When Vali, wounded and on the point of death, accuses Rama, what does the latter say in reply ? He has slain him in pursuance of the command of king Bharata, whom all of them obey ; and also because Vali was a mere monkey ! I could not think of anything more outrageous and irrelevant, cruel and cowardly. Rama's words but added insult to injury, I thought. But now I suppose you can explain this as well.

VALMIKI—Bharata, as you know, believed in the great forces of Nature ; and, as the whole question has now to be examined in the light of these forces, Bharata is the king whom all agree to obey. But Bharata also ruled in the name of Rama ; that is to say, he believed that the great forces of Nature were indeed characterized by the law of Sacrifice, and so were a stepping stone to the idea of God. Hence it followed that, though belief in Nature implies that life itself is evil, it is but a passing phase ; and we realise our error before long, and agree that our desires are, in their totality, governed by the same law of Sacrifice that governs Nature—that is, that they are on the whole intelligent, disinterested and good.

MAHAVIR—I think I follow. But it is not quite clear to me how Rama was obeying the command of king Bharata in slaying Vali, as he said.

VALMIKI—The command of Bharata is that we shall not believe that the forces of Nature end in evil, or that our desires and their objects are essentially bad. Vali, by holding the view he did, had transgressed this command. He must, therefore, make amends by learning the eternal law ; and it is this that is expressed in terms of his death.

MAHAVIR—This is very strange indeed. Then why was he slain merely because he was a monkey ? Was that a justification for his death ? How can this be explained ?

VALMIKI—By understanding the text aright. He was slain, not because he was a monkey, but because he represented only a part, and that a small one, of the whole idea of Desire. That is the real meaning of the “ monkey ” when you understand it.

MAHAVIR—This is still more strange, and I am so confused. How do you get all this ? I could not think of it when I read the text.

VALMIKI—I told you that Sanskrit is an ancient language, and the original meaning of the sacred books has, through the long lapse of time, been lost. We who live here are trying to interpret them in the light of the ancient method, according to which each syllable, each letter, has a meaning of its own. It is easy to grasp, and you too will understand. For instance, the word for “ monkey ” in the text is *Sakha-mriga* ; and its first part means “ a branch or a subordinate part ”, and the second “ desire ”. Thus you understand what the real meaning is, namely—“ a subordinate part of desire ” ; and that is what Vali represents.

MAHAVIR—I do not know what to say. I had thought that this at least would defy justification or explanation. But you can explain almost anything. Your idea of Bharata fascinates me. Has it anything to do with the name of India as Bhārata-varsha ?

VALMIKI—Yes. India is the land of people who follow Bharata's way of thought and life. In other words, they believe in Nature, but as subordinate to and culminating in God : that is, Jains, Buddhists, Saivites and Vaishnavites—all pursuing one end, God.

MAHAVIR—This is marvellous. How I wish to know more !

VALMIKI—When you understand the Epic in detail, and see how the Story and Philosophy are woven together into a wonderful pattern of life, both human and divine, your doubts will be dispelled, and the light of truth shine on you like the sun.

MAHAVIR—I humbly wait to learn.

VALMIKI—For the moment ask any questions you please.

MAHAVIR—I wish to know why Sita went through the ordeal of Fire after Ravana was slain ; and then again why she was exiled, after the lapse of ten thousand years, when she was bearing the twins.

VALMIKI—The defeat and death of Ravana means that it has been proved that the great forces of Nature are really governed by the law of Sacrifice. But the second part of the idea still remains : Does Sacrifice also lead to God ? Does it belong to him ? Does not the system of Brahma

claim it too ? What is the difference between the idea of Sacrifice in the system of Brahma and the system of Vishnu ? In other words, Can Sita go back to Rama after she has lived in the kingdom of Ravana for some time ? Rama knows that Sita is pure Sacrifice ; and that the idea of Sacrifice in the system of Brahma also belongs to God. But the common people need to be convinced of it too ; and it is this that is expressed in terms of the ordeal of Fire through which Sita passes to prove her character. Fire is Agni in Sanskrit ; and Agni is the god of the Sun, the supreme symbol of Buddhi or intelligence in sacred literature. Sita proves, in the light of this Buddhi or intelligence, that Sacrifice belongs really to God.

MAHAVIR—This is wonderful. And her second exile ?

VALMIKI—You remember that she was bearing the twins when this happened ; and Rama knew her condition.

MAHAVIR—Yes ; and that made it all the more horrible.

VALMIKI—Have patience. You know that a child is described as the fruit of a person in the sacred books ?

MAHAVIR—Yes ; as a tree yields fruit, even so does a mother bear a child.

VALMIKI—Sita is bearing children now : that is, Sacrifice is seen to bear fruit. What follows ? What is the relation of Sacrifice to fruit ? Sacrifice is defined as good, intelligent and selfless action ; and if this action is seen to bear fruit, can it be regarded as purely selfless or as a Sacrifice ?

MAHAVIR—I am somewhat confused. I suppose not.

VALMIKI—That is exactly what the system of Brahma holds ; namely, that since all action has some reaction, consequence or fruit—which again is associated with Nature—no action can be regarded as a pure Sacrifice, leading to God. Now, if Sita or Sacrifice is seen to bear children or fruit, may it not be held to be a Rakshasic idea of Sacrifice ?

MAHAVIR—There is something in what you say. But I suppose this too has a catch somewhere.

VALMIKI—Well : and so the people complain that Sita, having lived in the kingdom of Ravana, is not worthy of Rama; and that the king was setting a bad example by keeping her with him. How long after the defeat of Ravana this happens, is irrelevant to the issue. What must we do if, at any time, we find that it is commonly believed that Sacrifice may bear fruit ?

UMA—So Sita was not really exiled ?

VALMIKI—She was. Now tell me, Can we associate Sacrifice with fruit, and yet regard it as pure—a fit offering for God himself ?

MAHAVIR—I suppose we must renounce it. The Gita says that we must renounce the fruit of all action ; and that, I suppose, includes Sacrifice too.

VALMIKI—And so Rama was justified in sending Sita away ? It does not seem so horrible to you now ?

MAHAVIR—You have put a very different construction on the whole story. But pray proceed. Why then does Rama take back Sita and her sons ?

VALMIKI—You know the story. The twins were taught to dedicate themselves to Rama, and to utter nothing but his name. They were also strictly enjoined to accept nothing in return.

MAHAVIR—I remember.

VALMIKI—Rama represents the Mind ; and his twin children are the twin-born senses of knowledge and action. And when the senses function only in the name of God, without seeking anything in return, they are a true Sacrifice of the senses, and acceptable to God.

MAHAVIR—Now I remember. The Gita says that we should renounce the fruit of action to God, and perform all actions in his name.

VALMIKI—It is the same idea that is expressed in the Ramayana in this form. When, therefore, the twins sing of nothing but Rama, the fruit of Sacrifice is admitted by all to belong to God himself, and so Rama receives them in his arms, and recalls Sita too. This completes the whole idea of Sacrifice, and it is accepted by all.

MAHAVIR—Why then did Sita enter the earth, as we are told ?

VALMIKI—She arose out of the earth when it was prepared for a Sacrifice ; and she entered the earth again at the end. Thus is the whole cycle of thought made complete; and the idea of true Sacrifice enters into every nook and corner of the earth. That is the end.

MAHAVIR—Yes, that is the end. I have heard. I have listened, but have only partly understood. What you have said is so clear, so consistent, and seems so true ; and yet it is so utterly amazing, and I am lost in the wonder of it all.

As wonderful doth some one see this all ;

As wonderful doth some one of it speak ;

And some one hears of it as wonderful :

Yet hearing still doth no one understand !

I hear this echo of the Gita ringing within me. But a new light dawns on me, and I wish to know more. How grossly did I think of Rama ! Who can forgive me ? But how wonderful is all this, how wonderful ! It is fools alone who scoff ; and I have been the biggest of fools.

VALMIKI—*Think no more of it. Those who have faith may find ; and also those who seek and are sincere.*

UMA—I am so confused, and know not what to think. This is more wonderful than words can tell. I too wish to know more. But can I, O holy Father, understand ?

VALMIKI—*Yes, both of you can understand. But it is now late, and you must have some rest.*

MAHAVIR—As thou biddest, sire. But can we really understand the whole story of the Ramayana in this way ? What you have explained is so wonderful, so beautiful, and so true !

VALMIKI—Yes, you will understand. But you must go to my brother Angirasa, who will explain the Upanishads to you. They are the foundation of all ancient Philosophy and Religion ; and when you have understood them, you will be able to grasp the idea of both the Epics—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

BOTH—As thou willest, sire.

VALMIKI—Rest awhile in this place. Knowledge and peace will come to you in time. (*Calls*) Usha, Usha !

The Little Girl appears.

Call the other children now.

Usha goes out and returns with the children. They all sit down and sing. Valmiki, Uma and Mahavir join in the chorus :

O Lord of Raghus, Raja Rama !
Saviour of sinners, Sita Rama !

SCENE III

THE PINE FOREST.

Mahavir and Uma are slowly walking up-hill

MAHAVIR—I am not surprised at what you say. It has been a strange experience : one of the strangest I have had. I almost think it was a dream ; but the memory of it is so fresh and clear.

UMA—No ; it was not a dream, but a wonderful reality. I cannot forget what I saw and heard : the holy Father, so gracious and good, and the little children, so simple and sweet. When he spoke, I thought the whole thing was clear as day-light ; but now I do not know what to think. I feel so lost.

MAHAVIR—I think I have grasped the idea. I had so many questions to ask ; but he bade us wait, and understand the Upanishads first. He said that the sage Angirasa would teach us, and his Ashram lay in an easterly direction. He was a wonderful man.

UMA—Most wonderful. And the little children—weren't they wonderful too ? How they smiled and sang !

Sings in a low tone : Mahavir also joins.

O Lord of Raghus, Raja Rama !

Saviour of sinners, Sita Rama !

So Sita is Sacrifice, and Rama the lord of this Sacrifice !

MAHAVIR—And this is the idea of Krishna, Vishnu or God—the lord of Sacrifice. Ravana too believed in Sacrifice, but to a limited extent ; and so he could not be the lord of Sita or Sacrifice. Nor must we believe life to be evil—for the great forces of Nature, and our own desires associated with them, are all governed by the same law of Sacrifice—goodness, intelligence and joy—that is God. Sacrifice is action without fruit ; and when it bears fruit, we must reject it : but if the fruit be dedicated to God, it is transformed into true Sacrifice again.

UMA—How beautifully is the whole thing explained.

MAHAVIR—This is Ramayana. The Mahabharata too is an account of Philosophy ; and the idea of the two Epics is almost the same. So Mira is right after all. How wonderful is this ! I am lost in the amazement of it all.

UMA—So am I. But why was this not discovered before ? We should have known how beautiful, how true, our religion is.

MAHAVIR—There is a time for everything ; and this is a part of the mystery of life. Civilizations come and go ; and ideas and forms of art appear, disappear and re-appear.

UMA—Yes ; but how much has been lost !

MAHAVIR—And now regained ! But we have walked since the morning, and you are tired, I think. We are far from the Ashram, and the main pathway is distant still. Let us rest awhile. Here is a pool of clear, cool water. How the spray leaps up as the water comes down the steep hill-side !

UMA—Yes ; let us rest awhile. You must be tired too. (*They sit down in silence*)

Enter an Old Man, carrying a load on his back, bent low with its weight. He looks at them as he passes, and stops.

MAHAVIR—Sit down, friend, and rest. You look tired.

UMA—Sit down, brother, and eat. Here is a little food.

OLD MAN—(*Sighing and shaking his head*) No ; I must on. But you are kind. I have not heard the like of you speak so sweet. Food is scarce nowadays.

UMA—Alas ! Pray sit down and eat.

MAHAVIR (*Rising and helping him to take off his load*)—Let me help you, friend. It is so heavy.

OLD MAN—(*Sadly*) It belongs to great folks. You are too kind, too kind. (*Sits down*). From where do you come ? From the Ashram ? It is a wonderful place. Did you see my little girl, Usha ? We hear strange stories. There are some old men about, but no one knows from where they came. They have built Ashrams here, and sometimes they come out and sing strange songs, and the whole village turns out to see them. Usha heard one of them,

and now she is living in his Ashram. Wonderful man !
The poor woman cried and would not part with her ; but
the little child smiled so sweetly, and she let her go.
Strange place, strange people !

UMA—What strange stories have you heard ?

OLD MAN—Of Rama and Sita and Krishna and others, which I
can hardly remember. Folks say the gods come down and
visit the holy men, and the children say they see them too.
But I am old, I am old. I must bear the burdens of the
great : how they think I am too highly paid when they
fling a four anna piece at me !

UMA—(*Giving him some food*) Take this, brother. I should
like to hear more of your little Usha.

OLD MAN—She is a jewel. She is a favourite of the holy man
yonder ; and when I hear her sing, all my burdens are lifted,
and I feel so light and happy. Have you heard it ?
(*Sings*)

O Lord of Raghus, Raja Rama !
Saviour of sinners, Sita Rama !

*Uma and Mahavir join, and close their eyes. When they
open them, the Old Man seems to them to bear a strange
likeness to Valmiki, the Sage. They bend down and touch
his feet.*

THE END

